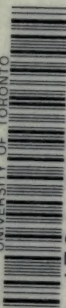


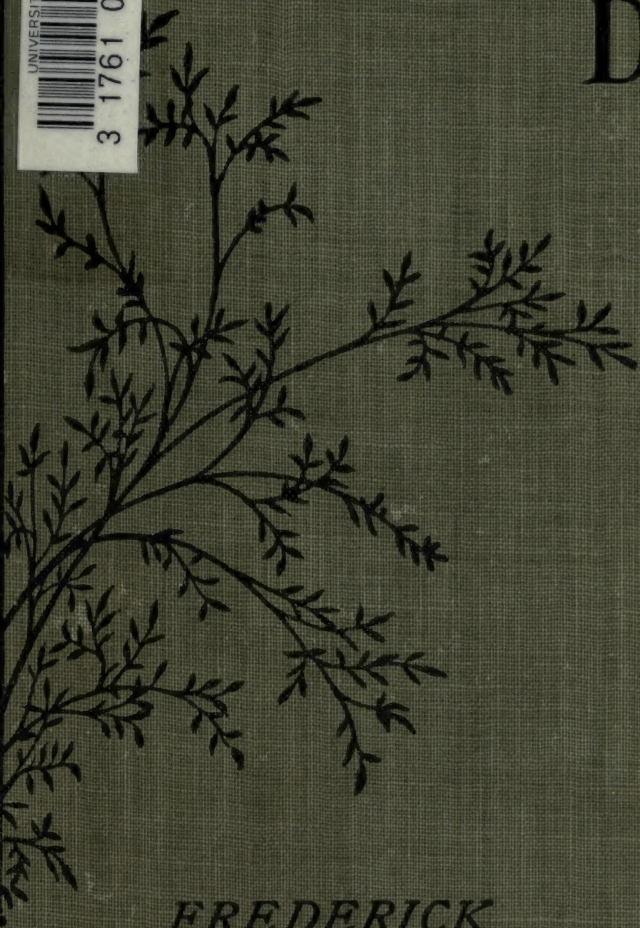
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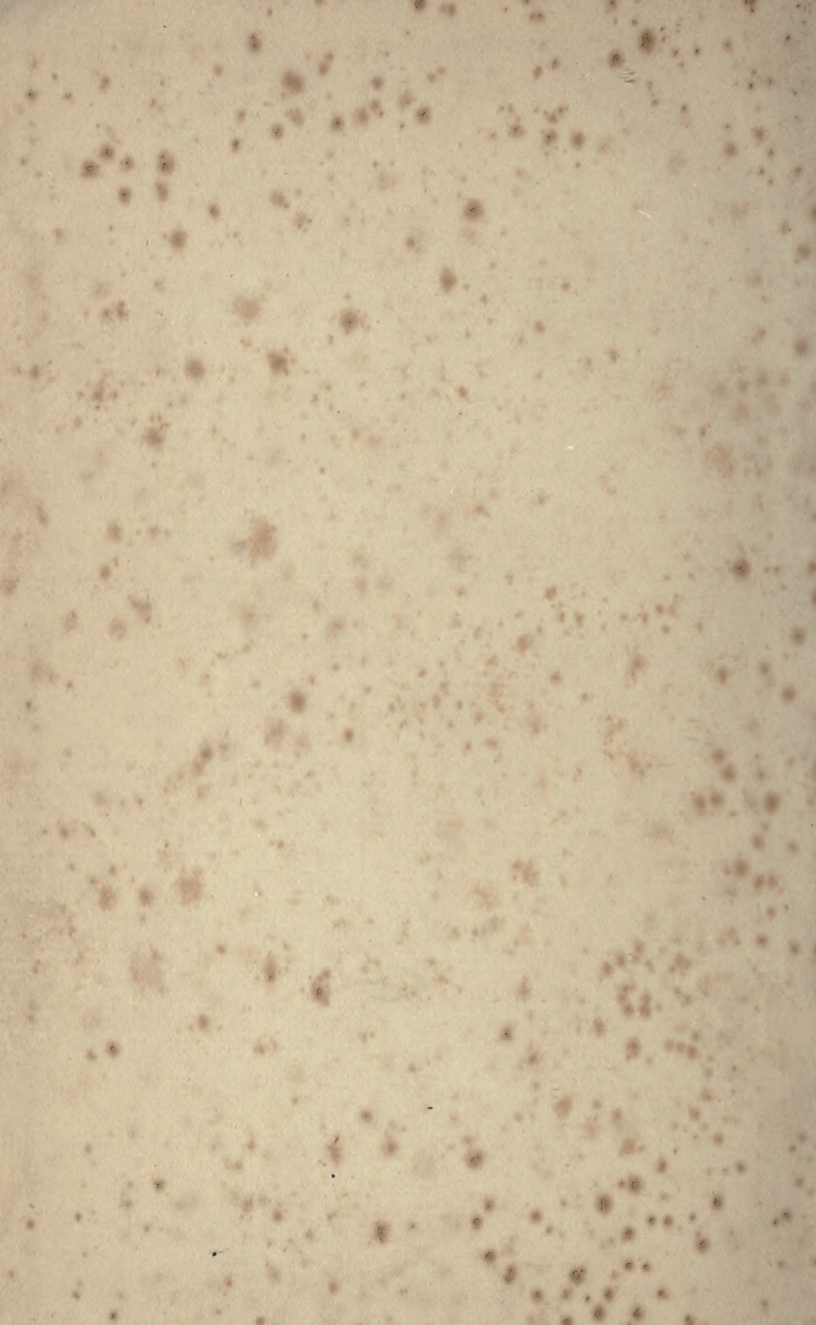
FREDERICK

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a Shintan vowel.

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"PARSON DICK"

BY

FREDERICK HARRISON

AUTHOR OF

"1779: A STORY OF OLD SHOREHAM"; "WYNPORT COLLEGE";
"THE BOYS OF SPARTAN HOUSE SCHOOL"; "THE CHOIR
SCHOOL"; "FROM PLAYGROUND TO BATTLEFIELD";
"A CHEMICAL CHART"; ETC., ETC., ETC.

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CHAPTER I

A PROPHECY

IN a room in one of the colleges of a university in England were three young men. It was the last day of the term.

"It's nice to be some people," exclaimed the youngest of them, Edward Armstrong, who had just completed his twenty-second year. "I envy you, Lion. At twenty-three years of age you quit the 'varsity distinguished in mathematics and science, possessed of a fortune, the best all-round athlete of the year, and even your personal appearance is passable."

"Thanks, Ted," replied Lionel Standish, laughing. "Can't you rake up a few epithets for Dick?"

"Dick is above all flattery," said Edward Armstrong, "so I won't waste flowery language on him. Everybody is disappointed with you, Dick. You could have headed the list in classics, had you chosen to read for honours, instead of allowing your name to appear only a few inches from mine, a humble passman. I suppose it is due entirely to your contempt for what you call 'intellect worship'?"

"You musn't forget, though, Ted," remarked Lionel, "that your fellow humble passman took the Hebrew prize."

Richard Richardson, the third young man, merely smiled. He was tall and of spare build, while his thoughtful face and broad forehead showed him to be a young man of more than average intelligence. Lionel Standish was nearly as tall as Richardson, but of very powerful build; while Edward Armstrong, the first speaker, was slim and short.

"It seems," said Richardson, "that we are about to part now, after being schoolfellows and college chums for a period of twelve years or so. Everything in this world must have an end, even——"

"Parson Dick," exclaimed Armstrong, "spare us a sermon until you are ordained. I will promise to come and listen to you then."

"But not before, Ted, eh?" inquired Richardson, smiling.

"I wonder what our lives will be," said Armstrong. "I will be a prophet and outline our possible futures. Dick will be a parson in a dirty neighbourhood in a large town—London, probably—where he will get thinner and paler until he kills himself by overwork, and then there will be a stained-glass window in the church announcing that Richard Richardson was born and died, etc. Lionel—the fierce, impetuous, hard-headed, good-hearted philosopher—will be a sceptic. He doubts much now, and will doubt still more as he thinks too much. He will be a great scientist, well versed in all philosophy, ancient and modern, and will try to discover more than it is possible for any human being to find out; and finally he will be a dangerous sceptic, or return to his early belief. As for myself, I haven't enough brains to doubt, for which I am thankful. I haven't enough money to be a philosopher, for which I am

also thankful. You never heard of a poor, hard-working family man being an unhappy sceptic or a philosopher indifferent to human affairs in general. You want a good income for that line of life. I shall be a very ordinary man, with very ordinary views of life and death. I shall be in my father's office learning about the tonnage of ships, etc. I shall marry when I have a reasonable prospect of being able to support a wife and family, and I hope to be a respectable member of society, like the average of mankind, who live unknown to the world and die unregretted, except by the family circle."

"Perhaps your life will be wisest," remarked Standish. "It will certainly be the happiest. Dick's will be the most blessed, and mine the most—what shall I say"?

"The most foolish," replied Armstrong. "If it is neither a happy life nor a blessed one, it can't be worth living."

"Ted, you have uttered more truth than you are aware," said Standish, quietly. "I am not satisfied with my creed. I have attended chapel and conformed to the 'varsity regulations for the last year or so, because I agreed to when I signed my name at entry. I have determined to tear all my old belief into shreds and begin life anew. I am not going to accept any dogma merely because it is conventional. I intend to travel round the world, and converse with all the scientific men and philosophers I can meet. I have spent three long vacations in Germany, but I wish now to go further—to America, and also to the East. I will candidly confess that at present I am an Agnostic—only one step from a Higher Critic. I can see, Dick, that I am already paining you, but I

cannot help it. I am unable to stifle my thoughts or ignore my doubts. I disbelieve much of what I have accepted previously. It is not that *I will* not believe the dogmas of Christianity; it is that *I cannot*. Be the result what it may, whether my pursuit after truth makes me a confirmed Atheist, or brings me back, as Ted prophesies, to my early belief, I am going to follow the bent of my mind and clear all my doubts on life and death. I am now playing the *rôle* of a spectator in this world's affairs, and by studying my fellow-creatures I shall learn more than a library can furnish. I have endeavoured to remove all pre-conceived notions from my mind, and whatever my ultimate decision may be, it shall be the result of careful search and unbiassed judgment. I shall be branded as Atheist, Freethinker, Sceptic, and so on, but those words will not deter me in my search after truth."

Richardson had gazed earnestly at Standish while he was speaking, and, when he had finished, he crossed the room and laid his hand on his friend's shoulder.

"Lionel," he said, with deep earnestness, "there never yet was an honest and earnest seeker after truth but found it. So may it be with you, and may the Almighty bring your mind to a haven of rest in the end."

Lionel looked into Richardson's earnest face as they clasped hands.

CHAPTER II

AFTER SEVEN YEARS

IN the early part of the nineteenth century, Blaxton Avenue was the address of well-to-do merchants, and even of many who considered themselves within the aristocratic pale; but the times have changed, and, although of unquestionable respectability, the addition of the letters S.E. (instead of S.W.) to Blaxton Avenue indicated that it was, at the end of the century, far removed from all pretence to the circle of fashion. The houses were large, and possessed gardens both in front and at the back, the latter being of what a modern builder would consider extravagant size. A few of the houses were detached, and had a carriage drive. One of these was held in absolute freehold by Dr. Joseph Tippet, the leading medical practitioner of the locality. In the neighbourhood the slums had rather increased than decreased, and many large houses had been razed to the ground by the speculating builder, who had in place thereof built streets of small tenements.

The residence of Dr. Tippet was still called by its old name, "The Manor House." Its occupants consisted of the little doctor—for Dr. Tippet was short in stature and spare in build—and his two

daughters, Rose and Violet. Unlike her father, Rose, the elder, in her twenty-second year, was tall and stately. Violet was short and undignified, a very merry girl of about twenty, who inherited the geniality of her laughter-loving father. Both girls were decidedly good looking. Rose was handsome, with fair hair and oval face. Dr. Tippet used to call her "Prim Rose," as she was queenly in her dignity. Violet was a brunette, with a complexion that other girls envied. Dissimilar as they were, both in appearance and in disposition, they were deeply attached to each other and to their widowed father.

Dr. Tippet was clean shaven. He had a small Roman nose, which supported a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, and an abundance of unruly grey hair, which defied alike comb and brush. His geniality was his passport. He was welcomed at the homes of the rich and of the poor. If his prescriptions did not always benefit his patients, his smiling face and ready humour never failed to cheer a depressed invalid. He was considered to be in good circumstances, and one of the proofs adduced in evidence of this was the fact that he never pressed his patients to settle his annual accounts. If they paid, he thanked them; if they did not, he never seemed to trouble. His carriage was drawn by a pair of fine grey horses, and his coachman had been with him since boyhood.

"Girls," he exclaimed to his daughters at breakfast on a lovely June morning, "Edward wishes to bring a friend to dine with us on Sunday."

"What a bother, dad!" said Violet. "We shall have to be so conventional. I hate ceremony."

"Who is it, father?" inquired Rose.

"He is an old college friend both of Edward and

of Parson Dick," replied the doctor. "His name is Lionel Standish. He is a friend and colleague of the great scientist, Dr. Rayson."

"I hate clever people," exclaimed Violet. "I always think they are laughing at my ignorance and stupidity."

"Then, Vi, you are at least at home with Edward Armstrong," said the doctor, laughing. "Although not deficient in common-sense and business tact, his university career has not been a very distinguished one."

"I like teasing him, dad," said Violet. "He is always so good tempered. He told me that Mr. Standish used often to say, 'If you show me a person whose equanimity is never ruffled, I will undertake to show you a fool.'"

"Then, Mr. Standish will not have a very high opinion of Edward nor of me, I fear," replied Dr. Tippet. "All the same, I think it is pleasanter and better to go through the world laughing than crying. I shall not allow myself to be ruffled more than I can help, even if the result be at the risk of loss of prestige for mental superiority."

"Mr. Standish argues that if a man has the power of forming a judgment," said Violet; "those are the very words Ted used——"

"Mr. Armstrong, you mean, Violet," observed Rose, quietly.

"He always calls us by our Christian names," replied Violet, blushing slightly, "on the strength of having known us from childhood; and as I hate all the forms and conventionalities of society, I shall call him Ted, as I have done for the last ten years or more."

"Well, Vi," said her father, "you have not yet finished telling us what Edward said was Mr. Standish's argument."

"Mr. Standish says, 'If a man has the power of forming a judgment,'" continued Violet, "'he must differ from others at times, and if he is honest he must express his opinion. In proportion to his strength of character, so will his vehemence of assertion be, and this is the cause of all altercation.'"

"You don't mean to say, Vi," exclaimed the doctor, "that Edward could remember all that?"

"Yes, dad, and unaided, too," replied Violet, laughing. "He has repeated the same to me so often that even I remember it."

"Mr. Armstrong says Mr. Standish is a very clever man," observed Rose. "By the bye, father, has not Mr. Standish graduated at Heidelberg in philosophy?"

"Yes, Rose," replied Dr. Tippet; "he is a Ph.D."

"Doctor of philosophy!" exclaimed Violet. "Won't he bore us terribly? He will be talking to you, dad, of germs, of bacteria, of toxin, and anti-toxin, until I shall yawn and have to leave the room."

"Dr. Rayson must have thought you extremely rude when you did so at his last visit, Violet," said Rose. "I hope if Mr. Standish, or rather Dr. Standish, comes, you will not forget the courtesy due to a visitor."

"Rose," replied Violet, "when learned men are in the company of ignorant girls like myself, they might at least make the conversation something which can be understood by them. I won't say interesting, as Dr. Rayson can only talk of subjects which are as dry as a desert to ordinary mortals. I am not clever as

you are, Rose, so I won't pretend to be interested in subjects which are above and beyond me."

"I have arranged to dine on Sunday late, so that Parson Dick may join us after the evening service," said Dr. Tippet. "The three college friends will then meet together for the first time for years."

The little doctor quitted the room to commence his morning round, Rose went to issue her orders for the day to the servants, and Violet was left alone. She played with a Persian kitten for a few minutes, and then passed through the French window to the lawn at the back of the house. She seated herself under the shade of a tree and mused.

At the end of the garden ran a passage, which, being a short cut from one main street to another, was much used by pedestrians. There was a sudden gust of wind, and Violet was surprised to find a gentleman's straw hat fly over the high garden wall, and after a few gyrations fall at her feet. Amusement speedily replaced the first sensation of surprise, and she tripped gaily to the back door to open it and restore the hat to the owner. It took her some moments to move the rusty bolts, as the door was but rarely opened. When she had overcome this difficulty and finally opened the door, she saw a tall, handsome gentleman patiently awaiting the restoration of his property.

"I must offer many apologies for the trouble I have unwittingly caused you," he said. "I think I may attribute no small blame to the wind for its rudeness. I had hesitated whether I dared risk being taken for a burglar by climbing over the wall for my obstreperous hat."

"I wish you had," replied Violet, with a laugh.

"It would have been fun if you had dropped into the water tank under the wall, wouldn't it?"

"For you, perhaps," said the stranger, smiling. "I am sorry to have disturbed you, and now I will continue my peregrination, as I am trying to find out the residence of the Reverend Richard Richardson. I have been directed and misdirected several times."

"If you ask for the Reverend Richard Richardson," replied Violet, "you won't ever find him. We all call him Parson Dick. Even the street urchins know him under that name. Pardon me, but are you Dr. Lionel Standish?"

"How can you have guessed my name?"

"Because Ted—I mean Mr. Armstrong—said he was going to bring his old college friend, Lionel Standish, to dine with us on Sunday, and he has shown us your photo. Dad said that Parson Dick completed the trio of chums, and so I made a guess that you might be that Dr. Standish."

"A very good guess, too, Miss Tippet, as I assume your name to be."

"There you are wrong, although you are a learned doctor of philosophy."

"I beg your pardon, I am sure. Armstrong certainly spoke of being invited by Dr. Tippet, and I assumed that you were his daughter, as you used a homely word which signified parental relation. Dr. Tippet is not, then, your father?"

"Yes, he is."

"And yet you are not Miss Tippet?"

"No."

"Dr. Tippet is your stepfather?"

"No, he is my genuine dad. Isn't it fun for an underbrained girl to be able to puzzle a learned man?"

If you had been a girl instead of a philosopher, you would at once have solved the riddle. I am not Miss Tippet, but my sister Rose is. I am Violet Tippet, the younger and absolutely useless daughter of Dr. Joseph Tippet."

"Miss Violet Tippet, I apologise for my stupidity," said Lionel, laughing.

"You are taller than I am, Dr. Standish, aren't you?"

"I think I may venture to answer in the affirmative."

"You are stronger than I am also?"

"Quite possible also, Miss Violet Tippet."

"Then, if you aren't afraid of making your philosophical hands dirty, or, to express myself in befitting language, as my father does sometimes, if you don't mind coating your hands with ferric oxide, Dr. Standish, perhaps you will have the goodness to shut that door and bolt it. You must come in and see Rose. Won't she be cross with me for introducing myself in this unconventional way!"

Lionel closed the door, obedient to the request of the young girl, who washed the rust off her hands in the garden tank and wiped them on her handkerchief. She then conducted him into the dining-room, and, leaving him to take a chair or stand as he might choose, she ran to the top of the kitchen stairs and called her sister—"Rose! come up into the dining-room at once; I want you."

Violet then tripped back to the dining-room, where Lionel was standing hat in hand. Rose entered, quite ignorant of the presence of a visitor. She had on a large tuck apron, as she often assisted in cooking, and many a poor patient received a delicacy which she had made.

"Rose," said Violet, laughing slyly at her sister's dilemma, "here's Dr. Standish. Only to think that his hat should have introduced him!"

Rose remained motionless. She blushed like the flower with which she shared her name.

"How do you do, Miss Tippet?" said Lionel, advancing, wishing to relieve her of her embarrassment.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Violet; "you are right this time, Dr. Standish."

"Then I am progressing in common-sense," said Lionel, laughing.

"Rose," said Violet, "Dr. Standish's hat blew right over the wall, and when I opened the back gate, there he was patiently waiting for it. He wants to find where Parson Dick lives."

"I have been seeking for the last hour for my old friend's lodgings," remarked Lionel. Either I am stupid or the people I have asked are very vague in their directions."

"Don't blame other people," said Violet, laughing.

"I am quite willing, Miss Violet Tippet, to assume all the responsibility on my own part," replied Lionel, good-temperedly. "I will say, owing to my stupidity, I have been wandering about for an hour, vainly endeavouring to find Parson Dick, as Miss Violet says he is called."

"It is not easy to direct you, Dr. Standish," said Rose, "although Mr. Richardson's residence is not more than ten minutes' walk from here, as you have to turn through so many streets."

"Rose, I am going to take those books to Parson Dick this morning," observed Violet. "If Dr. Standish is not too proud to be seen in the company of a

frivolous girl—that is what your aunt, Miss Hannah Standish, once called me—I will show you where Parson Dick lives.”

“I am extremely obliged to you,” replied Lionel, smiling. “I may add also that I am not too proud to be seen in your company.”

“Well, that’s saying something,” said Violet. “I will just put on a hat which *won’t* blow off.”

The merry girl quitted the room.

“I must apologise for my sister’s apparent rudeness,” remarked Rose. “I am afraid my father and I have somewhat spoilt her, as she refuses to obey the regulations which society demands.”

“I am glad to hear you say so, Miss Tippet,” replied Lionel. “Society falsifies our lives to such an extent that it is pleasing to find anyone who refuses to be bound by its golden fetters.”

“Then I think you will in this respect be pleased with Violet, as she defies Mrs. Grundy.”

“Yes, that’s quite true,” exclaimed Violet, re-entering at that moment. “There, I haven’t kept you long, have I?”

“Indeed, you have not,” replied Lionel, “and in return I will not keep you waiting. I hope to have the pleasure of meeting you again on Sunday, Miss Tippet.”

Violet led the way. Lionel followed her into the street.

“I shall be lectured on my return for my want of decorum,” observed Violet. “I am afraid all Rose’s efforts are thrown away on me. You are not accustomed to walk with ladies, Dr. Standish?”

“No, I am not.”

“So I thought, or rather so I knew. If you were

accustomed to walk with ladies, you wouldn't take such strides. I have to take three steps to your one, and I don't want to run to keep up with you."

"I beg your pardon."

"I don't suppose, Dr. Standish, that you would give a light-brained girl credit for much thought, but I should not so far have forgotten myself as to suggest showing you the way to Parson Dick's if I had not a motive for doing so. He often talks of you, and I believe you have more influence over him in some respects than anyone else. We are awfully anxious about him. He gets thinner and paler, and I am afraid he is going into consumption. We all try to persuade him to take a rest for a few weeks. Ted—Mr. Armstrong, I mean; we are very old friends—has urged him for months to go to the seaside for a month, but he won't. He is in this respect as obstinate as a woman. I want you to promise, Dr. Standish, that you will tell him it is his duty to preserve his health for the benefit of his poor people. It's of no use trying to frighten him by saying that he is killing himself, as I believe he would like to die. Lay great stress on its being his duty to keep himself in health. Before I go a step further, you must promise to do what I say. If you don't promise, I shall leave you to find your way yourself."

"I will certainly promise to exert my influence," replied Lionel, glancing keenly at Violet as he spoke. He had detected the abrupt change in her tone, and wondered whether under the external lightness of manner there lurked a real heaviness of heart.

She met his gaze fearlessly, and Lionel, although he prided himself on being a keen and correct reader of character and motives in others, was baffled. She

looked much younger than she was, and for the first time in his life Lionel felt a little interest in one of the opposite sex. Hitherto he had been quite indifferent to women. It cannot be said that he was a woman-hater, as that is only the reflex action of a woman-lover, and he had never experienced the sensation designated love. In youth he had avoided girls, feeling something akin to contempt for his friends who had shown any predilection for female society.

"Well, Dr. Standish, and what do you think of me?" suddenly exclaimed Violet.

"I beg your pardon," replied Lionel, startled by the abruptness of the question.

"You only say those words so as to give yourself time to avoid answering my question. I know you were thinking of me by the look you gave me just now. It was as much as to say—'Can it be possible that a hair-brained girl can presume to fall in love with Parson Dick?' Don't deny it. You big-brained philosophers have to think out everything before you can get at the truth. We common mortals have a short cut to it. We feel the truth."

"Intuition."

"If that word means that things come to you without the trouble of thinking, it's the right word."

"That is exactly what it does signify."

"You have not answered my question; but never mind; here we are at Parson Dick's."

Lionel Standish felt that he had fallen both in his own estimation and in that of his companion. How could she have guessed his thoughts? He had spent years in the study of mental and moral science. His favourite occupation was to study his fellow-creatures, and here was a girl, who possibly did not even know

the meaning of the words introspection or biological and sociological methods, able to divine his thoughts as clearly as if he had expressed them.

Violet had stopped at the door of a small house adjoining an iron church in a barrack-like street. She opened the door and walked in, followed by Lionel. She ascended the stairs and knocked at the door of the front room.

"Come in!"

"I have brought you the books, Parson Dick, which I promised," said Violet. "There, only fancy a woman keeping her promise! I have also brought you a big, walking, scientific encyclopædia."

Parson Dick looked round.

"Lionel!" he exclaimed, rising and grasping his old friend's hand.

"Dick, I am delighted to see you," replied Lionel.

Without a word, Violet slipped away, leaving the two friends alone.

"What a strange girl!" said Lionel, directly she had quitted the room.

"She is not an ordinary girl, Lionel," replied Parson Dick, "and I like her all the more for it. Although to a casual observer she only seems a light-hearted girl, she must think a great deal. The original remarks and sensible suggestions she makes at times are the result of thought, and not of mere talking. So you have at last returned from your travels?"

"Yes, Dick. I intend to remain in England for the present, as I have promised to assist Dr. Rayson in his researches. I have travelled round the world since I left Germany, and I shall be pleased to rest and continue my studies."

"What is Dr. Rayson endeavouring to do now? Is it to find out the secret for making the body immortal?"

"Not quite. Dr. Rayson believes that light, heat, magnetism, electricity, sound, chemical action, and gravitation are but different manifestations of one great force yet to be discovered."

"And you are seeking for that force?"

"Exactly so."

"Does Dr. Rayson no longer hope to find the origin of life?"

"He thinks that the force from which life is evolved is one and the same as the force which manifests itself in electricity, light, heat, etc."

"I am disposed to agree with Dr. Rayson's assumptions to some extent, although I should probably give it a name different from his nomenclature. Where are you going to live?"

"In a house at Streatham. It is close to Dr. Rayson's, and my aunt has kindly consented to be my housekeeper, so I shall have nothing to trouble about in that respect."

"I need not ask if you are still a bachelor, as I have no reason to doubt it."

"None, Dick. My aversion to the society of women is as great as ever. I daresay you wonder how I came to be conducted to your residence by a girl. It was my straw hat that caused me to be introduced to the Misses Tippet this morning."

Lionel explained how the introduction had been effected.

"Armstrong attends my church every Sunday morning and evening. He dines with me or with Dr. Tippet, and goes home at night. He lives on Brixton Hill," said Parson Dick.

"I suppose that Miss Violet Tippet is also a regular attendant at your church?"

"Yes, she plays the organ, and her sister and Ted are really our choir. Dr. Tippet is a quasi-church-warden."

"I must say, taking women in general, Ted has made a good choice."

"You think that Miss Violet is the attraction?"

"There cannot be much doubt about it."

"Ted is a good fellow. He has stuck to his father's office well, and will make a good husband. He helps me a deal. Whenever I have a concert, he is always ready to take the entire management of the affair, and invariably hands me over a few pounds."

"There are two sisters, Dick."

"You mean, Lionel, that I should make choice of one?"

"I do."

"Then you approve of matrimony in others if not in your own case?"

"I leave others to tread the beaten path, Dick. I will live my own life in my own way, be the end what it may."

"Most single men marry. I am a single man. I shall probably marry. Is that your line of argument? You see, Lionel, I have not forgotten all my logic, as this is an enthymeme."

"Quite true; but you do not answer my question, Dick."

"I have two reasons for not marrying. I think that the first duty of every married man is to look after his household and train his children aright. The default of this is the cause of more than half the vice and misery in the world. If I married, I could, there-

fore, only devote half my energy to my parishioners. My second reason is that no man should marry unless he has a reasonable prospect of being able to support a wife and family."

"And that, Dick, is the cause of the other half of the misery in the world; so, to be logical, he who would rid the world of misery must advocate celibacy."

"I cannot follow you so far as that, Lionel. Imprudent marriages are doubtless the cause of much misery, but not the sole cause."

"I am to infer from what you have said that your stipend here is not a very large one."

"No, I have never any fear of being compelled to pay Income-tax."

"Dick, don't you think a man is very foolish willingly to allow his expenditure to exceed his income?"

"I don't owe a farthing to anyone, Lionel."

"I did not mean to insinuate any such thing," replied Lionel, smiling. "I was only suggesting a proposition in general."

"Certainly, a man is foolish to do so."

"Then, Dick, it applies with tenfold force to the man who wittingly works beyond his strength. A deficiency in money can be supplied by others, but broken health is more difficult to repair. Dick, you are thinner and paler than you used to be. You are overworking yourself. Here you can scarcely get a breath of fresh air."

"It is the same air as my parishioners are compelled to breathe."

"I am not so sure that there is any compulsion. To keep yourself in health is your first duty, and you need some relaxation. If you are completely pro-

strated, you can be of no service to your people, so be sensible and apply temperance to your energies. Let me call for you two afternoons a week and take you for a good walk, and then you can dine with me. You used to be very fond of walking."

"And so I am now."

"Which afternoons can you best spare?"

"I do sometimes go as far as Dulwich on Thursdays. I have even indulged in a few strolls in Epping Forest, but they take too much time and money."

"Dick, I shall call early for you next Thursday, and we will have a good walk in Epping Forest. We will go by train to Theydon Bois, and walk through Epping Thicks to Ambresbery Banks, thence to Loughton Camp and High Beech, and return by Connaught Water to Chingford Station. There, Dick, that will be an ideal walk if the weather is fine."

"Lionel, you tempt me."

"Good. I will not waste any more of your time now, as I hear some one knocking. I hope to meet you again on Sunday evening at Dr. Tippet's. Good-bye."

Lionel returned to his home in deep thought.

CHAPTER III

MISS STANDISH CALLS ON DR. TIPPETT

WHEN Violet left Parson Dick's house, she entered a baker's shop and bought some buns, and then she walked for about a mile until she arrived at the parish church, of which Parson Dick's mission church was an offshoot. Two urchins with pale but clean faces were waiting at the door.

"Tom, you here as well as Harry?" she said.

"Yes, ma'am."

"I have brought you a bun each, as I want to practise on the organ for ever so long. You must take turns, or you will be tired."

The boys readily accepted the buns, and followed Violet into the church. It was a building dating back some years, and in it had been skilfully blended ugliness and inconvenience. The rector, the Reverend Samuel Rogerson, M.A., was an elderly parson of the Low-church type, and steadfastly set his face against all innovation, both in structure and in the service. The old three-decker pulpit still remained, and a large gallery ran round three sides of the oblong building. At the west end, in the gallery, stood the organ, and thither Violet ascended. The organ was an old instrument, but had been recently renovated. Violet

sorted out the pieces she wished to play. She then seated herself, and was soon lost in the music. After playing a few pieces, one of the boys came round to her.

"If you please, ma'am," he said, "will you sing us Parson Dick's hymn? We do like it."

"Certainly, Harry."

As she played the opening bars of the hymn, of which Parson Dick had written the words, and Violet, in conjunction with the parish church organist, had composed the music, her countenance seemed to change, and in lieu of a light-hearted girl her face became as sad in expression as her voice was pathetic in tone. The first verse she sang quietly, but in the second her voice rose and rang through the empty church. So absorbed was she in the hymn that she was quite unaware that two persons had entered the building. One listened for a few minutes, and then left, while the second seated himself in a pew and remained motionless until she had finished the hymn.

"Miss Tippet," he exclaimed, "do sing us that 'ymn again. I do like it."

"I did not know that you were there, Mr. Smithkins," replied Violet. "I thought I had locked the door."

"No, you 'adn't," said Mr. Smithkins, "so as I 'eard you a playin', I came in. Please go through that again."

"Certainly," replied Violet. "Come, Tom, you know the tune and the words, so you must help me."

Again Violet sang the hymn, and Tom, who had a good voice, accompanied her.

"Thank you, Miss Tippet," said Mr. Smithkins. "I like to 'ear the organ played, and so I just stepped

in. I must go now. I'll leave each of them boys a tanner in my pew for blowin'. Good day."

"Do you know, ma'am," said one boy while the other had at once descended to fetch the money, "Mr. Smithkins often has Mr. Moxon here to play the organ to him? We blow, and he always gives us a bob between us. I believe he pays Mr. Moxon as well."

"Indeed," replied Violet.

Mr. Moxon was the organist and a teacher of music. He was an excellent musician, and had been Violet's instructor. Mr. Smithkins was a brewer, and he was also a rich man, which is the usual sequence of being a brewer. He was likewise one of the churchwardens, which is by no means a rare occurrence if a man is a brewer and rich also.

"Bung forks out orright," observed Tom, as he handed his companion one of the sixpences.

"Who is Bung?" inquired Violet.

"We calls Mr. Smithkins Bung, because he's a brewer, ma'am," replied Tom.

"He's very fond of music," said Violet.

"Mr. Moxon says Bung gets miserable at times, and that's why he has him to play," replied Tom. "I only wish he felt miserable more often, as it means a tanner to us every time."

"I can't think what he's got to be miserable about," observed Harry. "He ain't never hard up for a thick 'un."

"He owns more than twenty pubs," added Tom.

The conversation of the boys was cut short by Violet resuming her playing, and when she had finished she gave each of the boys a guerdon. Tom locked the door of the church and took the keys to

his father, who was the verger. As Violet was returning to her home, which was at no great distance, a carriage and pair stopped close to her.

"Vi, come and drive back with me."

"Certainly, dad," replied Violet.

"I thought I should probably meet you at the church," said Dr. Tippet, "but I found you had gone. I am rather later than usual."

"Dr. Standish called this morning, dad."

"Indeed; I am sorry I was not in."

"He only called for his straw hat, dad. I was seated on the lawn, when a straw hat came over the wall and fell at my feet."

"Humph! Will the owner follow the example of his hat?"

"If you are going to talk nonsense, dad, I won't speak another word to you all the way home."

"Do you think, Vi, you could remain silent for ten minutes?"

"Do you wish me to try, dad?"

"No, Vi, because I am as fond of chatting as you are."

"I managed to pull the rusty bolts back to restore the hat to the owner, when I immediately recognised Dr. Standish. Ted has shown us his photo, and he is a man with a face which is not an ordinary one."

"Whose face? Edward's?"

"Ted's is a very ordinary face. You know I mean Dr. Standish."

"Well?"

"I asked him if he was Dr. Standish, and as he said he was, I introduced him to Rose. He said he had been wandering about trying to find Parson Dick, and so I went with him, as I wanted him to persuade

Parson Dick to take a good holiday. Dad, do you think Parson Dick is consumptive? "

"I hope not."

"Dad, will you answer my question? When Parson Dick was ill in the winter you attended him. Tell me, is he consumptive? "

"I believe not."

"Don't you know, dad? "

"At present there are no certain indications of consumption. That is all I can say."

"He would be in much better health if he were at a seaside town or in the country? "

"Undoubtedly."

"If he were not such an obstinate man, we might be able to persuade him to accept some curacy where it would be healthier."

"There is one word which sums up all Parson Dick's creed and life."

"You mean 'duty'? "

"Yes, Vi."

"I asked Dr. Standish to tell Parson Dick that it was his duty to take a holiday, and on Sunday we shall know if he has succeeded. Ted is going to bring his friends."

"Which he may some day regret."

"What do you mean, dad? "

"Nothing, Vi," replied her father, laughing.

"If you are going to talk nonsense, dad, I shall be very cross."

"I doubt it, Vi. I have never seen you angry yet."

"Never? "

"No, although at times you are very determined."

"I am determined now, dad, that Parson Dick shall have a change of air, and you must help me."

Ted has tried for months to persuade him, and even offered to conduct some of the services while he was away."

"I don't think Parson Dick will go away for a few weeks. There is in his district a man who has seen better days, and is now dying by inches. He is terribly afraid of death, but Parson Dick has soothed him and quieted his fears to a great extent. He has promised, if possible, to be with him when he dies, and that is one reason why he will not go away at present."

"Duty again, dad."

"Yes, Vi. I cannot say how much longer the poor fellow may linger. It may only be a week or two, or it may be a couple of months."

"Then I know it is useless to attempt to persuade Parson Dick at present."

"I met a lady at this poor fellow's whom you do not much like."

"Who was she, dad?"

"One of the parish church district visitors, who has decided to come and help at the mission church. She wears a very ugly straw hat and blue spectacles."

"Miss Hannah Standish?"

"Yes, Vi. In fact, Vi, I am rather afraid that I—eh, or rather she——"

"What, dad?"

Dr. Tippet's answer was a restrained laugh.

"She has invited herself to lunch, dad?"

"Yes, Vi. She has several more visits to make, and said she should call about one and see Rose."

"And so you asked her to lunch, dad?"

"Very nearly, Vi, and she accepted at once."

"She doesn't like me, dad. She always makes

remarks which I know are intended for me. Won't she be cross when she knows I was so forward as to introduce myself to her nephew!"

"You need not tell her, Vi."

"Oh, won't I, dad? Yes, I will, as it will be fun to see her look over her blue glasses at me. She likes Rose, as she is well behaved, and I suppose I am not. Why can't one be natural, dad, without being considered a reprobate?"

"Vi, I shouldn't love you half so much if you weren't what you are. Whatever old maids or young ones may say, your old dad would not like to see you moulded into conventionality, even to please Mrs. Grundy and all her sex."

The carriage had reached the door, and the little doctor alighted from one side, while Violet jumped out of the other and ran indoors, just as Miss Hannah Standish appeared at the gate.

"Dr. Tippet, I am here five minutes before punctuality," said Miss Standish.

"Yes, Miss Standish," replied Dr. Tippet, consulting his watch mechanically from habit.

Miss Standish followed the doctor into a small room reserved for Rose and Violet. The latter had gone to fetch her sister to bear the brunt of the ante-lunch conversation, but she reappeared directly the meal was announced by the gong.

"Dr. Tippet," said Miss Standish, "you know that my nephew has returned from his long travels?"

"Yes, I do," replied the doctor. "Edward Armstrong has undertaken to bring him and Parson Dick to a little dinner on Sunday."

"I am glad to hear it," said Miss Standish. "The more Lionel sees of Parson Dick the better for him."

The last year at college seemed to make him waver in the Christian faith, and for seven years he has been a sceptic. He does not call himself one, but he is so. He is an Agnostic. Our vicar told me that Agnostic was derived from a Greek word which signified 'unknown.' So I suppose if he is an Agnostic he does not know, and so the sooner he begins to learn the better for him."

"Decidedly," assented Dr. Tippet.

"Although he refuses to worship God, he does not hesitate to bend low before intellect," continued Miss Standish. "He says Dr. Rayson has a giant intellect, and he spends most of his time with that scientist. I really believe, Dr. Tippet, that they expect one of these days to precipitate a human soul in their test tubes, and then dry it on a filter paper and examine it under a microscope!"

"Doesn't Dr. Standish ever enter a church?" inquired Violet.

"Yes, my child," replied Miss Standish, looking over her dark glasses at the girl. "He will walk for miles to hear good music, but that is all he goes for now."

"I am afraid, then, he won't often come to our little church," said Dr. Tippet. "We sing heartily, but scarcely musically."

"Lionel has a fine bass voice," continued Miss Standish, "and can sing well. I accompany him, and it is even to me a treat to hear him. I used to sing well in my young days. I know you are laughing at me, girls. I am an old woman now; but there, that's enough. I did not come here to talk about my nephew or myself. Dr. Tippet, I am anxious about Parson Dick. I have noticed from time to time how

ill he looks, and instead of getting better he seems to me to get worse, so I have handed over my district near the parish church to another, and am going to come and help Parson Dick. I have not asked him if he wants a fussy old woman to assist in his district, but I intend to do so for the present, at all events. Don't be alarmed Rose; I am not coming to lunch here every day uninvited, nor invited either."

"We shall be pleased to see you," said Rose.

"Fiddlesticks!" replied Miss Standish; "old maids like me, who express their thoughts freely, are seldom welcome, although we are put up with. Dr. Tippet, you must send Parson Dick away for a holiday. I shall tell Lionel to take him. It would do them both good—Parson Dick bodily good, and I hope my nephew will get some spiritual benefit. I shall expect you, doctor, to do your part next Sunday in urging Parson Dick to preserve his health before it is too late."

"You may reckon on my doing my best," replied Dr. Tippet.

For the first time, Violet began to feel more friendly disposed towards Miss Standish, as she perceived beneath her brusque exterior there beat a kind heart.

"When is your next church concert, Violet?" inquired Miss Standish.

"Our midsummer entertainment will be in three weeks' time," replied Violet.

"Lionel shall sing two songs, if there is space on your programme," said Miss Standish. "I know he won't refuse to do that. I will give him credit for his good qualities. Although he says he is not a Christian, he never rails against religion. I must

confess I have never heard him use the harsh expressions against Christians that some do against sceptics, or even against those who hold different views only. He readily gives when I ask for money. He is rich for a bachelor. I don't know how much his income is, but it can't be less than five thousand a year."

As Miss Standish uttered these words, she glanced over her glasses at each of the girls in turn. Rose was looking down, and did not notice her, but Violet's gaze encountered the dark, piercing eyes of their visitor. There was a slight frown on Miss Standish's face, which quickly relaxed into a smile.

"Mr. Armstrong arranges all our concerts," said Violet. "We will ask him to add Dr. Standish's name, if he is really willing to sing before a roomful of poor, ignorant people."

"That would attract, and not repel him, Violet," replied Miss Standish. "He takes a real interest in the welfare of the poor, and often expresses a wish that it was in his power to do something which would bring some wide and permanent reformation in their circumstances. With all his scepticism and cynicism, Lionel could never be classed in the same category as the Socialist and Atheist you have near your mission church. I mean that cobbler Links. I remember some months ago I was going to see Parson Dick. I had my church service in my hand at the time, and so he must needs make rude remarks to his companions aloud, ridiculing religion so that I might hear them. I stopped, as I am not afraid of any man, and I looked at him over my glasses. He did not say another word, but sneaked away."

"I am not surprised at that, Miss Standish," said Violet, laughing. "You used to frighten me in the same way, but I am used to it now."

"That's right, Violet," replied Miss Standish, smiling. "Perhaps I am not such a dreadful creature as I look. Now I must be off. Good-bye."

Without another word, the visitor abruptly left them, hardly giving Rose time to run and open the door for her.

"Did you tell Miss Standish that we had seen Dr. Standish?" inquired Violet of her sister when she had returned to the room.

"No, Vi," replied Rose. "She talked so much that I had no chance of saying anything before lunch."

"I should have told her, Rose," said Violet, "only I thought you would be sure to do so. She gave me one of those eagle glances over her spectacles when she said that her nephew had five thousand a year, and I thought that was a rebuke for my presumption this morning in introducing myself. I should like to hear what she says when he tells her that I walked with him to Parson Dick's."

"Perhaps he will not tell her," replied Rose.

Dr. Tippetts smiled broadly.

"Now, dad, what are you laughing at?" demanded Violet.

"I was only indulging in a merry thought," replied the doctor, laughing.

"At my expense, dad?" inquired Violet, seizing her father's hands.

"No, Vi, at my own," he replied.

"Tell me what you are thinking about," said Violet.

"Not now, Vi," replied her father, "but I will tell you when a suitable occasion arises."

"Then I would sooner not hear it at all," said Violet. "The times you consider suitable, dad, are

not always suitable to others, as you generally say something we would rather that you did not when we have visitors."

"Well, Vi, repeat your question on Sunday evening," said Dr. Tippet, "and I may then be tempted to satisfy your curiosity."

"That I certainly shall not do, dad," replied Violet, emphatically.

The little doctor left the room to take his usual forty winks before receiving patients, and the two girls went to their own sitting-room.

"I have just heard the postman," exclaimed Violet, bounding off to see what letters had been left.

Rose seated herself at a window which looked out into the street, and took up some needlework when Violet returned.

"There were three for dad, Rose, and one for me," said Violet.

"Nothing for me?" inquired her sister.

"No, sis, nothing this time," replied Violet.

Violet read her letter eagerly, and as she did so her face flushed and her eyes seemed to sparkle. Rose watched her closely and sighed.

"Your letter is from Mr. Armstrong, is it not, Vi?" she asked.

"Yes, sis."

Rose said nothing more, but commenced her needlework in a listless way.

"Ted is a good fellow, sis, indeed he is!" exclaimed Violet.

Rose glanced at her sister for a moment, and then resumed her work. Violet read the letter a second time, and placed it in her pocket.

"Now, sis, I am going to finish that picture for

Ted. I promised to have it ready a month ago, but Susan very kindly swept this room when I had left the picture wet, and so I have to repaint nearly half of it."

"Where is Mr. Armstrong going to hang the picture, Vi?"

"Nowhere, sis. He is going to give it to Parson Dick. It is a copy of a picture Parson Dick has often admired. Ted is helping me to arrange the colours. I am afraid Parson Dick will not be very pleased with it, as it is a very indifferent copy."

Violet was soon busily engaged in her painting. Rose glanced at her, and then with a sigh also resumed her work.

CHAPTER III

MISS OLIVE KENYERE, B.A., B.Sc.

"SHE'S been again!"

"Who is 'she,' Philip?"

"Why that woman—I mean lady—your cousin, Miss Kenyere, Master Lionel. When she called last time, she asked me if you were at home, so I said you weren't. Then she said she would wait until you came, as Miss Standish was away visiting for a few days. I let her wait for an hour or two, and when she asked when you would be back I said you hadn't returned from the Continent, and we did not expect you for three weeks. She took the hint and went, Master Lionel, and this blessed day she has turned up again. She's going to call again just in time for dinner."

Lionel took the card which the old butler gave him. It was "Miss Olive Kenyere, B.A., B.Sc."

"Olive has graduated in arts and science, then," he remarked to himself rather than to Philip.

Philip had been a servant in the Standish family from boyhood, and as he had known Lionel from infancy, and had called him Master Lionel from his earliest years, he still continued to do so. He was

an old bachelor, with an unconquerable aversion to the society of women.

"Will you dine at home, Master Lionel?"

"Certainly, Philip."

"You know she's coming, sir?"

"Yes, Philip."

"Then I've done my duty. I've warned you. If I was a young man and a young woman said she was coming to dine with me, that young person would find me 'not at home' when she called again. It don't count for nothing that she's your cousin. It would hardly be safe if she was old enough to be your aunt or your grandmother. Well, there's one comfort—Miss Standish will be at home as well."

As Philip made the last remark, he shuffled off, and closed the door of Lionel's study with an emphatic slam, as if he would exclude all women folk from the room.

Miss Olive Kenyere was a cousin of Lionel and an occasional visitor at his home. She would have probably called more often, but Miss Standish and she disliked each other by mutual consent. They seldom met without argument, which often became a heated disputation. Olive was about a year younger than Lionel, and having a small income, she had spent most of her time in study. Her ambition was to be a graduate, and by her card Lionel saw that she had succeeded in attaining the degrees she had sought.

Lionel seated himself at his writing table and mused awhile; then he wrote some letters, and, filling a large pipe, he lounged in his big arm-chair and smoked and thought.

Philip entered.

"I forgot to tell you, Master Lionel," he said, "but

Miss Standish said she wouldn't be back to lunch. Will you have your lunch here or in the dining-room, sir?"

"Here, Philip, if you please."

"I suppose if she should call again you are 'not at home'?"

"If you refer to Miss Kenyere, you may say that I am at home."

"But supposing, Master Lionel, she should call before Miss Standish comes back?"

"You may show her in and let me know."

"Master Lionel, that's what I call downright folly. Don't you know that you are rich and young and not bad looking? Not that that counts much if you are single and rich. Haven't I heard you say time after time you won't get married?"

"Yes, Philip."

"Haven't I said that you were a sensible young man for saying so, Master Lionel?"

"Yes, Philip."

"And then you deliberately put yourself into danger's way. When a young woman says she's going to dine with a young man, that young woman means something. Mark my words, Master Lionel, Miss Olive Kenyere never does nothing without a motive, and one day you'll say to me, 'Philip, you know more of the world than I do.' Some people live on and don't get no wiser for it."

As Philip uttered these words, he shook his head mournfully and went away to order his master's lunch.

Lionel finished his pipe before taking his lunch, after which he commenced to read a bundle of papers that Dr. Rayson had written in support of his great theory. While doing this, he was so absorbed in his

work that he forgot aught else. He made many notes challenging some of Dr. Rayson's statements or else confirming them. He had profound respect for what he called the giant intellect of the great scientist, and, as he followed the arguments, his admiration increased until he reached a point where Dr. Rayson was compelled to replace fact by assumption to reconcile his statements. Here Lionel paused, and, throwing himself back in his chair, was buried in deep thought. So preoccupied was he that, after knocking three times, Philip opened the door and said in a voice in which alarm and disgust were ludicrously blended:

"Master Lionel, she's come again! I knew she would be here before Miss Standish came home!"

"Don't let me disturb you, Lionel. Philip said you were in your study, and so I have come to save you breaking off the continuity of your work." It was Olive who spoke.

Philip's astonishment was so great that he simply stared.

"Well, I never!" he ejaculated, after a pause, and shuffled off again.

But for the presence of his cousin, Lionel must have laughed outright. As it was, he simply smiled, which Olive may have considered as a token of welcome.

"I see by your card that you have graduated both in arts and science," Lionel remarked.

"Yes, Lionel, and I do not intend to rest until I am D.Sc."

"Judging from what you have done, I have no doubt that you will succeed in attaining the height of your ambition."

"Thanks, Lionel. I have no doubt I shall succeed, if I may reckon on your assistance from time to time. I hear you are assisting Dr. Rayson in his researches."

"To a limited extent I am."

"I am staying near here, and I am going to ask a favour of you." She paused, but Lionel did not reply.

"Would you kindly allow me to come occasionally and do a little work in your laboratory?"

If there was one spot which Lionel considered his sanctum, it was his laboratory. He would not allow anyone to enter if he were absent, as he had lately lost hours of labour through one of the servants sweeping and cleaning the room. He would have liked to refuse her point blank. He hesitated.

"I will see," he said, after a pause, "what time I can arrange to have the laboratory clear for you."

"Thanks, Lionel, awfully. It is very kind indeed of you," she replied. "Don't let me disturb you. I want to consult some of your books. I can see some of the volumes, and I will sit at this table and make my notes, so as not to interrupt your work."

Lionel began to regret that he had not followed the advice of Philip. He could not possibly continue his work while a woman was fidgeting about, and so he abandoned the task. Olive saw this, and plied him with questions on science, which may have arisen from a desire to gain information or to impress him with a sense of her own erudition. This continued until the dinner bell rang. Lionel went off to dress, and when he took his seat at table Olive was there, and Miss Standish was glancing over her spectacles in an ominous way at the self-invited visitor.

"Humph!" ejaculated Miss Standish, "you have kept me waiting, Lionel."

This remark was intended for Olive.

"I am very sorry, aunt," replied Lionel.

"Perhaps you have been hindered?" suggested his aunt, again looking over her glasses.

There was a slight suspicion of a smile on Lionel's face, but he did not reply. Olive's impassible face remained unmoved.

"So you are a graduate in arts and in science," remarked Miss Standish.

"Yes, aunt," replied Olive. "Lionel has very kindly volunteered to help me in my studies for the doctor's degree."

"Indeed!" said Miss Standish, looking at Lionel.

"He has also offered to allow me to pursue my studies in his laboratory," continued Olive.

"Indeed!" again ejaculated Miss Standish, with added emphasis.

"I shall not be satisfied until I am a doctor in science," said Olive.

"And do you think you will be satisfied with that?" demanded her aunt.

"I cannot say, aunt."

"I can, Olive. Nothing short of matrimony can ever satisfy a real woman."

"Aren't you satisfied, aunt?"

"Content, but not satisfied. I would not now change my condition even if such were possible, but my aim in life was not to be a single woman nor a manly one. At nineteen I was engaged, but my husband that was to be was drowned, and I am still Miss Standish. Women may flounce about with cap, gown, and hood as bachelors in arts, but they will find that the way to matrimony does not lie in aping men. Men who are worthy of the name choose womanly

women, not those who aspire to be learned ones."

"Perhaps, aunt, there are some women who really love learning and desire to be single."

"Fiddlesticks! They may say so, but every woman would be married if she could. A man may love learning for learning's sake, but a woman—never. I know what women are, although I am neither a bachelor in arts nor a spinster in science. There are two motives only which prompt a woman to acquire honours in learning."

"What are those, aunt?" inquired Olive, with unmoved countenance.

"The desire of admiration," replied Miss Standish, again glancing over her glasses, "and to have her name in the papers, and perhaps a likeness of herself—that is the first motive. The second is the desire to annoy her own sex and make them envious."

"Do you think those are the motives which have prompted me?"

Miss Standish did not reply, but her glance indicated an affirmative. Lionel smiled.

"The proper vocation in life," continued Miss Standish, "for every woman is that she should be domesticated—a family life. Women now aim at rivalling men, instead of being their helpers; but nature will be revenged on them, and women will have to remain single. In every path of life, whether it is in learning or in sports, women are now competitors where men had it to themselves previously."

"Don't you think, aunt, women are quite capable of beating men in what you consider 'manly vocations'?"

"If you mean, do I think women on the average are equal to men, I don't. A clever woman may beat

a stupid man, but a clever woman has no chance with a clever man. Although I am a woman, I will confess that. Women as women are a great success, but as men they are a great failure."

Lionel laughed outright. Olive's impassible face was still unmoved.

"But," persisted Olive, "if women don't get a chance of marriage, and have no income, they must seek some vocation by which they can earn a livelihood."

"Exactly so," replied Miss Standish, "and there are many for which they are well suited. Many more could get married if men were in a position to marry. They would be so if women had not entered into competition and deprived them of many appointments by reducing the market value of men's wages materially. Those who first opened the Civil Service to women did our sex one of the greatest injuries they could. It has prevented hundreds of men from marrying, and consequently hundreds of women also. What chance has a woman of getting married after she has passed twelve or fifteen years in an office? None, or rather only one—if she has saved up enough money, she may be able to buy a husband. You may laugh, Lionel, but that is the truth. I know what men are. Give an ordinary man plenty to eat and drink, and let him smoke as much as he likes, and he will be quite content to let women do all the work, if they are fools enough to do so. Women were men's slaves. Christianity has emancipated them; but if we once take up men's work as well as our own, the day will soon come when we shall have to do it all. If women again become men's slaves, they will only have themselves to blame. I don't suppose, Olive,

you find hard facts like these in your books on ethics and philosophy?"

"No, aunt, I do not."

"More's the pity."

There was silence for some minutes, when Olive tried to change the subject by asking Lionel about Dr. Rayson's researches.

"I think, Lionel," she said, "there may be some basis for Dr. Rayson's hypothesis. There is an intimate connexion between light, heat, sound, magnetism, electricity, and chemical action. I should not be surprised if he finds the one great force. If he does, he will have made the greatest discovery of the age. When he has done this, and has found the origin of life, he will have accomplished a great deal towards destroying untenable beliefs and Scripture fables."

"Scripture fables!" exclaimed Miss Standish, nearly rising out of her chair. "This is only what I expected. Let women study science, and they will be sceptics. If women cease to be religious, then heaven help the generations to come! Until women aped men, there were no infidels in our sex."

"You surely don't expect me, aunt, still to believe all the fairy tales I was told in childhood?"

"I don't expect you to believe in anything except your own superiority over all your sex," replied Miss Standish angrily.

"I will ask you one question, aunt," calmly said Olive. "In your religion, how do you account for the origin of evil and its continuance? Can you give me a satisfactory explanation?"

"I can give you a satisfactory one, or rather an unsatisfactory one would be a better title. The origin

of evil is selfishness. The continuance of evil is due to selfishness. Let men and women cease to serve self, and evil will speedily vanish."

Olive slightly shrugged her shoulders, a movement which did not escape the keen eye of her aunt.

"Lionel," said Miss Standish, to avoid further conversation with her niece, which invariably ended in an angry dispute, "your old friend, Mr. Richardson, or Parson Dick as everybody calls him, is arranging a concert in aid of his mission work, and I want to put down your name for two songs. Mr. Armstrong is the manager of these little parochial entertainments. The two Miss Tippetts will sing also."

"I should think that they alone would fill a room," replied Lionel. "The younger one has a very sympathetic contralto voice."

"Do you know them, Lionel?" asked his aunt, who had noticed the effect of her words on Olive.

"Yes, aunt. A gust of wind introduced my hat to Miss Violet Tippet, and its owner followed," replied Lionel. "Afterwards, as I chanced to be passing home by the parish church, I heard the organ, and entered at the same time as another of my sex. Violet Tippet was at the organ, and she sang a hymn so well that I should have been tempted to remain, if the other intruder had not seated himself in a pew."

"I don't think that Violet has much brains," observed Olive, with a slight curl of the lip. "I have met her several times. I think, aunt, that she is endeavouring to fulfil what you consider woman's mission in life."

"Matrimony?" demanded Miss Standish, glancing first at Olive, then at Lionel.

"Yes," replied Olive, playing with her serviette

ring. "She has set her cap at Mr. Richardson in a way to cause public comment."

"Public comment!" said Miss Standish; "this is the first I have heard of it. The Tippetts, Rose and Violet, both are model girls. I should like to know whom the public consists of that talks so much of Violet's trying to catch Parson Dick."

"I have often heard it," replied Olive, unmoved. "She is brainless, and it may be that she is too obtuse to notice that other people watch her forwardness."

"Violet Tippetts is not brainless," said Lionel. "She has not attempted to commit to memory much book learning, but she is an original and deep thinker. If Parson Dick should marry either of the girls, I should consider that he had made a wise choice."

"I quite agree with you, Lionel," exclaimed Miss Standish, glancing over her glasses at her niece—or rather step-niece, as Olive was the daughter of her step-sister.

"Then, two of your friends may be sensible men, Lionel," said Olive, "as Mr. Armstrong is a frequent visitor. I do not know which of the girls he seeks. Perhaps Violet likes to have two strings to her bow."

"I will sing a few songs for you to choose from, aunt," remarked Lionel, to save an angry exclamation from Miss Standish. "You know most of them, so you can let Armstrong put down whatever you like."

"Very good, Lionel," replied Miss Standish. "I must ask Rose or Violet to play your accompaniments, as my piano playing now is not fit for a public performance."

"I will play your accompaniments if you like, Lionel," remarked Olive.

"I will not trouble you, thank you," replied Lionel; "I shall in all probability play my own."

Olive played music with great accuracy so far as the notes went, but so mechanical and soulless was her rendering that Lionel felt in her hands music ceased to be music. It was but a mathematical development of a theme.

"I should like to hear some of your German songs," observed Olive.

"With pleasure," replied Lionel, fearing lest some game of cards, which he detested, might be suggested.

Lionel sat down at the piano, when they were in the drawing-room, and sang to his own accompaniment, while Miss Standish and Olive listened, and occasionally exchanged a few words. There is no medium in women. They either love or hate, and Miss Standish and Olive did not love each other.

CHAPTER IV

EDWARD ARMSTRONG SEEKS VIOLET'S AID

"DICK," said Edward Armstrong, on the Saturday afternoon, "I have received a letter from Lionel, in which he says he is willing to assist us at our summer concert. If he sings as well as he did at college, he will be worth hearing."

Edward had called on Parson Dick, as he often did on a Saturday afternoon. It was on his road when he visited Dr. Tippet.

"I am very glad to hear it, Ted," replied Parson Dick. "I hope we may some day see him return to an acknowledgment of the truths of Christianity."

"If he would only be foolish enough to fall in love with a good woman, Dick, he would become as orthodox as I am."

"Then you think as I do, Ted, that on the whole the influence of women on men is greater than the influence of men on women?"

"I am sure of it, Dick. If I were in love——"

"Which you are, Ted."

"How can you have guessed that, Dick?"

"Guessed!" replied Parson Dick, smiling. "It has been a certainty to all except yourself for some time."

"I won't deny it, Dick. I am in love, desperately in love. If Rose told me to do anything, no matter how foolish, I should do it."

"Rose!"

"Yes, Dick, Rose. With whom did you think I was in love?"

"I have erred in judgment."

"You surely didn't think I was in love with Violet, did you?"

"I certainly did. You are nearly always together, and laugh and joke."

"That's because I am not in love with her, Dick. I feel quite at home with Violet, but when I am alone with Rose I can't utter a word. I make such a ludicrous exhibition of an awkward man that she must think I am a complete fool. If it were not for Violet's encouragement, I should have lost heart and hope."

"At present you have lost heart only, eh?"

"That is about it. If it should ever come to pass that I win Rose, you must marry us, Dick. We love your little mission church. Many, many happy hours have we spent in it and at your concerts during the last five years. I got my mother once to sound Dr. Tippet, but she only made a muddle of it. Violet is a brick. If I do ever marry Rose, it will be due to Vi's assistance. When I say I think that she is very nearly equal to Rose, I am saying all the good things that one can say. Vi will make any man happy if he should have the good fortune to win her."

Edward looked closely at Parson Dick as he uttered these words, but the latter gave no indication that he applied his remarks to himself.

"What is your programme for this afternoon?"

"I am going to fetch Vi and Rose, and we shall

practise on your organ. After that we are going to the flower show. Dr. Tippet is coming as well. Can't you come?"

"I hope to be there during the evening, but it may be late."

The flower show was only a district one to encourage the poor parishioners to cultivate plants. Dr. Tippet took great interest in it, and gave several prizes. The show was held in a piece of ground which was shortly coming under the hammer to be built on.

Parson Dick rose to go on his daily round, and Edward walked towards Dr. Tippet's. He entered without knocking from force of habit, and went into the large garden at the rear of the house, where he knew he would find the girls. To his disappointment, Violet was there alone.

"Ted, you are punctual, but too late. Rose has gone out, and won't be back until she meets us with dad at the flower show. Now, I know you're cross, aren't you?"

"Not cross, Vi, but disappointed. Where is she gone?"

"To take some beef tea and delicacies to some of Parson Dick's invalids. Don't be too disappointed, as I think I can arrange matters so that we shall meet her on our way to the church, and then she will be sure to accompany us."

"Do you really think so, Vi?"

"I do, Ted."

"Did you receive the letter I sent you on Wednesday?"

"I did."

"Did you show it to Rose?"

"No, Ted, I did not."

"Why not, Vi?"

"Because it would have prejudiced Rose against you. I am sure she thinks you are in love with me, and if you don't soon make some advance on your part she might take a fancy to someone else. Dr. Standish is a handsome man, isn't he?"

"Vi, you surely don't mean to say that you believe Rose has fallen in love with him? I know he is handsome and rich and clever."

"Don't be such an impetuous and foolish fellow, Ted. I have no reason to suppose that either Dr. Standish would take a fancy to Rose or Rose to him. I only said it to tease you."

"Vi, do you really think Rose cares at all for me?"

"Yes, I do."

"I wish she would give some indication of it."

"For which you would despise her afterwards."

"What does Dr. Tippet say?"

"Nothing."

"Do you think he would object to me as a son-in-law?"

"If he did, he would not welcome you here. I am sure he thinks you come to see me."

"I don't know how it is, Vi, but I feel quite at home talking to you and you with me."

"Well, Ted, that is because we know we don't care for each other, except as friends. Rose used to be nearly as free with you until you commenced to make advances."

"I know she did," replied Edward, mournfully. "I thought everything was going to run as smoothly as possible. If I only felt sure that Rose cared for me, I wouldn't mind."

"Ted, you must show more courage."

"I feel terribly courageous when I am not with Rose. I quite determined last Sunday to commence a regular courtship and speak up. During the sermon I thought of several pretty and suitable things to say, but when we were walking home together every word went from me. You walked with Dr. Tippet on purpose, I know, Vi. I began by asking Rose to let me carry her prayer book. She said it was too small to be any inconvenience, and when I pressed her to let me carry it, and was about to take it, I got so nervous I let it fall into a pool of mud. If it had been you instead of Rose you would have laughed at me. I shouldn't have minded that, but Rose never said a word. I wiped the mud off it, and I have bought a new one, which I am going to give her tomorrow. If you were in love, Vi, what would you do?"

"I should do my utmost to hide it until the man made some advance himself."

"Haven't I made some advances?"

"Only to me, apparently, Ted. Rose would not even tell me if she was in love, although she wouldn't deny it if I asked her."

"Then, Vi, do ask her. There's a good fellow—I mean girl."

"Ted, I have before promised to help you as much as I can, but I will say plainly I am not going to court my sister for you. I should myself feel contempt for any man who could not, or would not, make some effort to win my affections."

"Are all women alike?"

"Yes, Ted."

"That's something," said Edward, shaking his head.

"Don't be such a coward, Ted," replied Violet, laughing.

"Vi, look here," he began, earnestly, and taking the girl's hand as he spoke.

Violet happened to glance towards the house and saw Rose, who had returned unexpectedly, standing at the French window. Edward had not noticed her.

"Vi," he continued, "you must listen to me now."

Violet drew her hand hastily away from him and ran to the house, as Rose had fainted and fallen back into a chair.

Edward wondered why Violet had so abruptly quitted him, and was almost offended as he slowly followed her. When he entered the room, he saw Violet trying to restore her sister, who was in a swoon.

"Now, Ted," said Violet, seeing him turn almost as pale as her sister, "in our little room you will find a smelling bottle. Run and fetch it, quick."

He hurried off to do her bidding, and the exercise restored him to a certain extent. He came back just as Rose was opening her eyes. Violet made signs to him to leave the room, which he did.

"I am better now, Vi," said Rose. "It is very hot, and I hurried back, as I had forgotten one of my parcels."

Violet drew her sister's head towards her, and kissed the pale face.

"If you are going to practise the music with Mr. Armstrong, Vi, don't let me detain you. I shall be all right now."

"I am not going to leave you, sis, for Mr. Armstrong nor for twenty Mr. Armstrongs. He must amuse himself."

"But he will think you so rude."

"I don't care, sis, what he or anyone else thinks, so long as he doesn't express his thoughts."

"But he might feel hurt."

"If he expressed his thoughts, he would probably have reason to feel hurt after I had spoken."

"Vi, if you really cared for him, you wouldn't talk like this."

"Sis, I don't care for him, and that is why I do talk like this."

"Vi!"

Rose uttered that one syllable in a reproachful tone.

"Please, Miss," said the maid, "a lady wants to see you. Here's her card."

"'Miss Olive Kenyere, B.A., B.Sc.,'" read Violet. "What a nuisance! She has not troubled us with her visits for a long time. Tell her, Jane, that Miss Tippet is too unwell to receive any visitors to-day."

"No, Vi, I am really better now," persisted Rose.

Olive had followed the servant, as her invariable custom was at the houses of familiar acquaintances, even if not friends. There is no reason to doubt that she had heard Violet's remark, but Olive's face never indicated her thoughts. It was always impassible, and if she were capable of feeling human emotions she never expressed them.

"Rose," she said, as she entered, "you are not looking well. I am so glad I came, as I can sit with you while Violet is away. I suppose she is going, as usual, to practise some music with Mr. Richardson and Mr. Armstrong."

Without waiting for an invitation, Olive seated herself close to Rose. Violet looked cross. She had

just reached a point when she might have opened the way to her sister's heart for Edward, and the intrusion had spoiled it.

"The Reverend Richard Richardson will not be at church this afternoon," replied Violet, stiffly.

"You are going to practise with Mr. Armstrong alone, then?" said Olive, with a faint smile.

"Rose will accompany me, if she feels better presently," replied Violet.

"I do not think it wise for you to go out while it is so hot, Rose," remarked Olive. "I will stay and chat with you, and we will have a cup of tea together."

"I think, Vi, you had better not wait," said Rose. "Mr. Armstrong will wonder why you do not go. Where is he?"

"In dad's room, sis," replied Violet. "I will go with him, and return before we go to the flower show. It will be cooler presently."

"Ted," said Violet, when she entered the doctor's room, "Rose is better now. I will go with you to the church in a few minutes."

"Who is it that has come in, Vi?" he asked.

"Olive Kenyere."

"Lionel's cousin?"

"Yes."

Violet noticed how pale Edward still appeared when she returned ready to go out.

"Vi," he said, "must we go? I don't feel in the humour for singing now."

"Yes, we must go," replied Violet. "Besides, I want to talk to you."

"You are quite sure that Rose will be all right with Miss Kenyere?"

"Dad will be back in a few minutes."

They walked on some distance in silence.

"Ted, I hope you haven't taken any of dad's tobacco?"

"No, Vi. Why do you ask?"

"Because his tobacco is very strong, and you look very pale."

"Do you think, then, if I had smoked the doctor's tobacco it would upset me?" he asked, with a miserable attempt to laugh.

"It might, Ted. You have told me that your tobacco is the mildest. But enough of nonsense. Now for serious talk. If Olive Kenyere had not come in, Ted, I might have had the chance of saying to Rose what you wished. I believe Rose thinks we are engaged, and I was about to disabuse her mind when Olive entered the room.

"What a nuisance!"

"That is what I thought. Now, Ted, your time has come. You must play the part of a man, or you will never win my sister. By trying to help you, I have done you more harm than good, I fear."

"And yourself too, Vi. You have been like a sister to me. If I can ever help you in return, Vi, you may count on me. If, for instance, you should feel an attachment to any friend of mine, I would act for you as you have for me. It has never before occurred to me that in seeking my own ends and thinking only of myself I may have done you an injury without intending it."

"What do you mean, Ted?" inquired Violet, looking closely at him.

"What I say, Vi."

Violet was about to utter something, when she restrained herself. Then she changed her serious

mood to her usual light one, and began to rail at him.

"If I were a man, Ted," she said, "I would cut you out with Rose. I think I could manage to carry a prayer book without dropping it, and if I did bring my sweetheart some flowers, I don't think I should be such a noodle as to give them to her sister instead, and ask her to put them in the room!"

This is what Edward on the previous Saturday had done.

"How is a man to know when a woman is in love with him?" asked Edward in despair.

"We always do things by contraries, Ted. If a woman receives a man in a very friendly way, and laughs and chats with him quite at her ease, then you may be sure she doesn't care a straw for him. It is more than probable that she will be equally pleasant with the next comer."

"Then, Vi, it's quite certain that you are not in love with me."

"Quite, Ted. But when a woman is extremely reserved, in fact, barely civil to a man, treats him coldly, declines his presents, crushes the flower he gives her—and she will spend hours afterwards in trying to restore its petals—then, Ted, you may be sure that a woman is in love with you, and it is only due to a man's want of pluck that he does not win her."

"Then, Vi, if you know your own sex, and you ought to, Rose does care for me."

"As I have told you before, Ted, I am sure she does."

"It seems to me, Vi, that women act by contraries like—ahem."

"Like pigs, you were going to say, weren't you?"

"I am not going to own to it, even if that were the word, Vi."

"I shan't be offended."

They had reached the church. Edward pondered over what Violet had said, and determined that he would watch the indications of love in her. He had already formed his own opinion on the subject, and waited the development of events.

"Ted, you must blow the organ."

The obedient Edward readily undertook to do so. It was very hot, and, although the organ was only a small one, he grew very warm with the exertion. Of this fact Violet may have been totally unaware, or she might not have used the full organ so freely; but there was a merry twinkle in her eye as she saw him take off his coat and wipe the moisture off his face. She played several marches, and Edward was in deep thought. It did not require any great amount of perception to see that he was thinking of Rose, as from time to time he sighed, and more than once the organ also sighed, as the wind ran out owing to his having in his abstraction ceased to blow. Violet was in the middle of a fugue when the organ ceased to sound.

"Ted," she said, "you are not blowing."

"There you are wrong, Vi," he replied. "I am not only blowing, but I am puffing too."

As he said this, he came round from the back of the instrument wiping his face.

"You look warm, Ted."

"I am more than that; I am hot."

"Is it hard work?"

"I am not in training now, Vi. I believe you

have been using the full organ all the time purposely to make me perspire. The lead indicator has been bobbing up every minute. When I gave a few hard blows, so as to rest a moment, the wind ran out."

"You shall rest for a few moments, and then I will only use the swell and not the full organ. I want to try our solos, and then we will go back and see how Rose is. I was only too pleased to be absent while Olive Kenyere is at home. We have a mutual antipathy."

"I have only met her twice or three times, and I cannot say I like her any better than you do. When she learnt that I had only taken a pass degree, she shrugged her shoulders in contempt. She may be a very learned woman, but in my opinion she does not underestimate her own accomplishments, great as they may be."

"If she snubs a man, Ted, you may be sure that she snubs her own sex much worse."

Edward thought that probable. He was seated on the stool by the side of Violet while she was finding the music for their solos, as on Sunday evenings, after the short mission service, there was a sacred concert, which the congregation enjoyed to such an extent that the building was always full. Parson Dick used to give a short address about the middle of the programme, and thus had an opportunity of saying a few words to many who never attended an ordinary service.

While they were thus seated side by side selecting the music, Parson Dick entered. He was pale and tired. They had not heard him. He remained for a few moments gazing at them, and a slight sigh escaped his lips as he noiselessly quitted the church.

CHAPTER V

MR. SMITHKINS' SUGGESTION

"VIOLET seems very fond of church work," remarked Olive to Rose, after Edward Armstrong and Violet had gone.

"Yes," replied Rose, "she is much attached to our little church. I don't know what we should do without her assistance in the music. She sings so beautifully that we never get tired of listening to her."

"Violet is a pretty singer of hymns, but I have never heard her attempt any classical music."

"We make no pretensions. Violet sings with great pathos some of the oratorio solos. I love to hear her sing 'O rest in the Lord' and what we call Parson Dick's hymn."

"I have no doubt," said Olive, with a slight sneer, "Violet would sing any of that curate's compositions. She seems to take as much interest in him, I think, as in his church."

Even the amiable and gentle Rose felt ruffled at that remark, and was about to make a reply, when she restrained herself. There was a pause for some minutes while a servant brought in tea. Olive had sufficient of womanly nature in her to be willing to drink tea both strong and hot.

"Mr. Armstrong is fond of music, is he not?" she said.

"Yes," replied Rose, slightly colouring, which Olive's keen eyes detected in a moment.

"He is going to sing a duet with you at the concert, is he not?"

"Yes."

"He is a tenor?"

"Yes."

"My aunt informs me that Lionel has consented to sing at your next concert."

"I am glad to hear it."

"Who plays the accompaniments?"

"Violet or myself."

"If you are singing as well, surely it must be very tiring for you?"

"I do not mind."

"I know Lionel's songs and his style of singing. If it will be any relief to you, I will accompany him."

"Thank you very much; but is it not taking too much advantage of your good nature?"

"Not at all. Some of his accompaniments are very difficult."

"Then I am sure I should not care to play them. Violet might be able to do so, but I am only an indifferent musician."

"I suppose you play Mr. Armstrong's accompaniments?"

"No," replied Rose, fidgeting with the tea cosy; "Vi always plays them."

"Who accompanies Mr. Richardson?"

"He never sings."

"Does he play?"

"Not that I am aware of. He never takes any

part in our concerts, except to thank us at the end of the programme."

"Lionel is a good 'cellist."

"Violet will be pleased to hear that, as she often wishes we had a good soloist on some other instrument besides the piano."

"If the audience were capable of appreciating good, classical music, I would play a duo with him."

"We find that the poor people are quite capable of enjoying good music. We do not attempt difficult music, not so much because we doubt the power of appreciation on the part of the audience, as we do our own ability to interpret it."

"I will ask Lionel to play a duo with me, if it will not be too late for your programme."

"It will not. Mr. Armstrong will be pleased, I know."

"I dine with Miss Standish to-morrow, and I will ask Lionel then."

"Dr. Standish is going to dine with my father to-morrow night, and Mr. Richardson and Mr. Armstrong will also be here."

"I wondered why——" began Olive, and then she ceased speaking, and mused.

Rose glanced at her visitor a moment, to see why she had so abruptly stopped, but Olive's was not a countenance which indicated the motion of her mind.

"I suppose Lionel is not going to church to-morrow evening before he comes here, is he?"

"Not that I am aware of. Mr. Armstrong says he is not a Christian—I mean, that he does not consider himself a church-goer."

"You can't expect a scientific man to accept as

truth statements which can neither be proved nor reconciled with nature and science. I have long ceased to believe what I learnt in childhood."

Rose turned pale. Such an assertion from the lips of a woman not only astonished her but pained her also. Olive noticed the effect of her words on Rose, and slightly shrugged her shoulders, as if she pitied her ignorance.

A carriage drove up to the door, and in a few minutes the cheerful voice of Dr. Tippet was heard. He entered the room.

"Miss Kenyere, you here! I suppose I shall soon have to say Dr. Kenyere, eh?"

"I hope so, Dr. Tippet," replied Olive, pleased with the compliment.

"It is hot, and I am thirsty, Rose," said the little doctor.

"Will you have some tea, father, or coffee?" inquired Rose.

"Cocoa for children, tea for women, coffee for men," replied Dr. Tippet; "therefore give me coffee."

The doctor seated himself, and while he was sipping his coffee he chatted with Olive.

"I think from what I hear, Miss Kenyere," he said, "Dr. Standish will soon make as great a name in the scientific world as Dr. Rayson has done."

"I believe so too," replied Olive. "He is a very clever man."

"Dr. Rayson is really a clever man," continued the doctor, "which is more than I can say for every scientific man who makes a reputation. Many are only clever in utilising the brains of others by adopting the crude ideas and applying them to a subject. Dr. Rayson has shown considerable originality, and

his discoveries have not only been clever, but many of them will be of service to mankind."

"When he has established his great hypothesis by inductive reasoning, as well as from analogy," observed Olive, "he will rank as the greatest scientist of the day."

"Unless another scientist should disprove it in his lifetime," replied Dr. Tippet. "If a scientist has by real genius, or judicious advertising, directly or indirectly established a reputation, he can then theorise as he chooses. He will be sure to have a following. One man starts a hypothesis, a second proves it, a third applies it, a fourth disproves it, and a fifth begins again. So the world of science rolls on, proving and disproving, in many things leaving us at the end of a thousand years where we were at the beginning."

"Surely in your vocation, Dr. Tippet, great advances have been made?"

"In surgery, yes; in medicine, perhaps not. Doctors nowadays, if they have any common-sense, will wait before physicking their patients with drugs which may do more harm than good. If the doctor is himself patient, he will give but little physic—the less the better. The public is now waking up to this fact, and instead of rushing off for a doctor directly they feel ill, they very wisely go to bed and wait until nature—the cheapest and best doctor—has restored them."

"Surely, Dr. Tippet, you don't say this to your patients?"

"Not in the same words. I send them to bed, and wait and watch."

"If you please, sir," said a servant, "Mr. Smithkins wishes to talk to you for a few minutes. He says he won't keep you long."

Dr. Tippettt quitted the room.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, doctor," said Mr. Smithkins, "but you're such a busy man, it's difficult to catch you at liberty. Can you spare me five minutes now?"

"Certainly, Mr. Smithkins," replied the doctor, seating himself, and playing with a paper-knife, as if he were waiting to hear the symptoms enumerated.

"Parson Dick is a good man."

"He certainly is."

"He looks ill."

"He does."

"What he wants is an easier crib—I mean place—where he'll get more money and less work."

"Those would be real advantages to him, if he could be persuaded to accept another living."

"I know he's much attached to his slum. It's rough work for him. Well, doctor, to come to the point. Mr. Rogerson told me and Tomlyne that he was getting past work now, and he was going to resign his 'ouse—I mean vicarage. Now, I thought if we got up a deppitation and waited on Canon Paulminster—our church is his entire, so to speak—we might get Parson Dick the crib. He could still keep on his small shop—his mission church—and 'ave our show as well. He'd be better in 'ealth if he lived near 'ere, and he could go down into his slum for an hour or two when he liked. What d'you think, doctor?"

"An excellent suggestion, Mr. Smithkins. An influential deputation might have some effect on Canon Paulminster."

"Every man has got his price. It's only a question of the figger, in my opinion. D'you think a cheque for £500 would be worth more than a deppita-

tion? Let's ask Canon Paulminster straight how much he'd take for the living, eh?"

"I should hope that the Canon would not need to be bribed."

"I don't find parsons is much different from other folks. They have their price as much as you and me."

"Speak for yourself, Mr. Smithkins," replied Dr. Tippet, laughing.

"We will talk it over with Tomlyne, and maybe young Armstrong would come with us, as he was at college with Paulminster's son, who died a few years ago."

"I will ask him."

"Well, doctor, I thought if me and you and Tomlyne and young Armstrong was to go to Paulminster, with a petition from all our people, we might get the living for Parson Dick without his knowin' anything about it."

"I shall be pleased to do all in my power to further your scheme, Mr. Smithkins."

"Tomlyne is agreeable. He'll be at your mission church to-morrow night, and I'll come too, and we will set the ball rolling."

"Very good."

"Tomlyne is down at your church most Sunday evenings, isn't he?"

"Yes, nearly every Sunday evening."

"I knew he'd turn up at your place as soon as he 'eard that you was going to build a church in place of your iron shanty. Whenever he's absent from our church, I know he's after a job. If he only 'ears that any church is going to be restored or rebuilt, he takes a front seat in that place until the contract has been

signed, and he generally gets it, too. All the same, he's a good substantial builder, and if I wants a pub put up or altered, I calls Tomlyne in. Now, I won't waste any more of your time, doctor."

Dr. Tippetts saw the churchwarden to the door, and as he was shaking hands with him, Violet and Edward came in. The brewer shook hands with the latter, and said Dr. Tippetts had something to say to him.

"What have you to tell us, dad?"

"That Mr. Smithkins has called, Vi."

"I can see that, dad; but what did he want?"

"To do someone a good turn."

"Who is that someone—himself, dad?"

"Not this time, Vi," replied her father, laughing.

"Has Olive Kenyere gone yet?"

"She is still with Rose, I believe."

"As we are dining earlier, we shan't be able to get rid of her before."

"I suppose, Vi, you mean we shall have to invite her to dinner?"

"Yes, dad."

"And Edward will see her home afterwards."

"No, that I won't," replied Edward, emphatically.

"If women wish to be considered as men, they are quite capable of taking care of themselves."

They followed the doctor into his own room, and he told them what Mr. Smithkins had proposed.

"Dad, Ted, you must both go to Canon Paulminster. I wish I was a man, so that I might go too," said Violet.

"Perhaps, Vi," replied the doctor, "the fact of your being a woman might have more influence with him."

"Do you really think so, dad?" she asked, eagerly.

The dinner bell sounded, which prevented her father from replying. Violet went to Rose, and found Olive making a pretence of going.

"You are dining early to-night?" she said.

"Yes," replied Rose. "We are going to our little flower show this evening."

"I will call and see you again soon," said Olive.

"Sis," said Violet, "dad and Ted are waiting. Will you go to them at once, please?"

Rose wished her visitor good day, while Violet saw her to the front door without asking her to dine with them.

"There, dad," exclaimed Violet, as she sat down to dinner, "I think I am clever. I have got rid of Olive without inviting her to dinner. I sent you to dad, sis, as I knew you would ask her to accompany us this evening."

"Perhaps she would not have accepted the invitation," said Dr. Tippet.

"Disagreeable people always stay when they are not wanted," replied Violet. "I don't like Olive Kenyere, and she doesn't like me; and, what is more, we both know that we don't like each other."

"I share your aversion, Vi," said Edward, "and I think Rose does also."

It was the first time for months that he had called her by her Christian name. Rose turned pale, and then blushed painfully.

"Come, dad," said Violet, to hide her sister's confusion, "just tell us all about what Mr. Smithkins is going to do. Do you think we shall succeed in influencing Canon Paulminster?"

"That is more than I can say," replied the doctor. "He may have a son or a nephew or someone he intends to put into the living."

"Smithkins is not a bad-hearted man," remarked Edward, "but I have frequently wondered why brewers are so often churchwardens."

"You need not, Edward," replied Dr. Tippet. "It is a question easily answered—they give money freely."

"Yes, I know that, Dr. Tippet, yet it seems to me to be an anomaly. I can understand a man being a brewer because it pays; I can understand a man being a churchwarden, I won't say because it pays, even if I thought so—it certainly does if he is a builder; but I cannot understand a man being both a brewer, who owns pot-houses, and a churchwarden at the same time."

"He is not, Ted," said Violet. "Mr. Smithkins is a churchwarden on Sundays only, and a brewer on week days."

"Quite true, Vi," replied Edward, smiling. "About three months ago he came to one of our concerts, and after it was over, when Parson Dick and I were chatting in the street, he came up to us. 'Parson Dick,' he said, 'I should like to help you. Shall I give you a cheque?' Dick did not answer him at once. He placed one hand on Smithkins' shoulder, and pointed with the other to a flaring gin palace, where there were two women so drunk that they could scarcely walk. They were using foul language. 'Mr. Smithkins,' he said, 'if you really desire to help me in the regeneration of this neighbourhood, close that house on Sundays—or, better still, altogether.' Our churchwarden explained that he was only the managing director of the company. 'I know,' said Dick, in his impressive way, 'that neither companies nor committees, as corporate

bodies, have a conscience, but I hope as men that they are not beyond all power of appeal. Mr. Smithkins, drink is the curse of this neighbourhood. How can excessive drinking be stopped?' Smithkins wished us good night, and shuffled off."

"I am not surprised at that," said Dr. Tippet. "I remember a very good reply Parson Dick gave a clergyman who advocated moderate drinking. He had preached a sermon in aid of a Temperance Society which admits moderate drinkers as well as total abstainers. He made a powerful appeal for moderate drinking, and used his eloquence with such effect that I felt that every total abstainer ought to commence drinking at once. I might have been more influenced than I was, if I had not known that the reverend gentleman was a director in Smithkins' company, and at their general meeting he had warmly congratulated the shareholders on the great increase in their profits, and therefore in the amount of drink which had been sold. When he asked Parson Dick why he was a total abstainer, he replied he could not possibly hope to persuade others to cease drinking if he drank himself. The reverend shareholder then used the specious arguments usually employed to advocate moderate drinking. 'If,' replied Parson Dick, 'you can produce evidence of one man, since the Christian era, who has been ruined in soul, in body, in mind through abstaining from drinking alcohol, I will drink—but not before. I need not say how many millions, on the other hand, have been completely lost through drunkenness.'"

"What did the reverend shareholder say?" inquired Edward.

"He was offended," said the doctor.

It was still early in the evening when Violet and her father, and close behind them Edward with Rose, were walking towards Parson Dick's district. The ground where the local flower show was held was only about a hundred feet by fifty. There was a large tent erected at Mr. Smithkins' expense, and in it were arranged plants and vegetables reared by the poor folk. Prizes were numerous, and, though not expensive, of sufficient value to encourage window gardening and the cultivation of the small back spaces which some of the houses possessed.

They found the tent crowded by the residents of the neighbourhood, while not a few well-to-do people also patronised the show. Violet was an expert gardener, and many of the plants exhibited were from cuttings or seeds she had supplied. She was one of the committee, but the awards were made by a retired horticulturist who was a member of Parson Dick's congregation.

"I think the show is better than last year," observed Violet aloud, thinking her father was at her side.

"I am glad you think so," replied a voice.

Violet turned round, and saw it was Parson Dick who had spoken. Owing to the crowd, she was separated from Dr. Tippet, while Edward and Rose were some yards ahead.

"There are more entries this year," said Violet, "and that shows more people are trying to rear plants."

"The love of flowers, like that of music, may be a means of refining our people," replied Parson Dick. "I was amused and pleased this morning on hearing some children naming the various plants in our new

park. They must have been trying to cultivate some in their homes, or they could hardly have known the names."

He ceased speaking as an irritating cough troubled him for some minutes, the effort of which made him very pale. Violet looked at him anxiously. The judge came up and spoke to him, and so she continued her walk round the tent, but she only glanced at the flowers in a listless way ; her mind was preoccupied.

CHAPTER VI

EDWARD ARMSTRONG PROPOSES

"ROSE," said Violet, later in the evening, when they were alone, "you made a remark to me which I was about to answer when Olive Kenyere came in."

Violet paused. Her sister did not answer, and as they were seated in their own little room in the gloaming, she could not see the effect of her words on her.

"You remember, sis," she continued, "that you felt indignant with me for saying that I did not care for Ted. I meant to tell you plainly that I am not in love with him nor is he with me. We are just as friendly as we used to be, but neither more so nor less."

Again Violet paused.

"Sis," she exclaimed, "you must know that it is not I whom he comes to see."

Violet went to the side of her sister, and, throwing her arms round her neck, kissed her. Rose returned her embrace, and burst into tears.

"Now, sis," said Violet, "you shall take me into your confidence and confess the whole truth. Tell me plainly; surely you can trust me, can't you?"

"Yes, Vi," sobbed Rose.

"Sis, you are in love with Ted?"

"How can you possibly have guessed it, Vi?"

"You ought rather to say, sis, how could I possibly help knowing it. Ted is deeply in love with you."

"You are joking, Vi."

"Sis, although I am too lighthearted at times, I would not joke about this. I say it quite seriously. I know Ted is in love with you."

A servant knocked and entered.

"Please, Miss Violet," she said, "Mr. Armstrong wants to speak to you."

"I thought he was going to have supper with Parson Dick," observed Violet. "Tell him I will come in a minute. What a nuisance the man is!"

Violet left the room, and found Edward walking up and down the dining-room like a caged lion.

"I am really sorry to trouble you, Vi, but I have not had a chance of giving Rose the prayer book. Will you give it to her to-morrow morning?"

"No, that I won't, Ted. She is in our room alone. Go and give it to her yourself."

"I will, Vi."

Edward left the room, and Violet amused herself by arranging some flowers during his absence. Her bright smile no longer played on her lips, and her fingers seemed to tremble as she tried to put the flowers in order. She toyed with them awhile, and one flower she pulled to pieces. First the calyx went, and then the coloured corolla was plucked away, petal by petal. She gazed absently at her work of destruction, and a sigh escaped her lips as she gathered up the sepals and petals and placed them in the palm of her left hand. Half unconsciously, she softly sang the words of the first verse of Parson Dick's hymn.

"Vi!"

She was aroused from her reverie by Edward's voice, and hastened to their room.

"Vi," exclaimed Edward, excitedly, "it's all right."

"What is, Ted?" she asked.

"Rose and I understand each other at last," replied Edward, proudly.

"You may well say *at last*, Ted," said Violet. "Fancy a man being three years in love before he could screw up courage to say a word!"

"I must go now, Vi. I shall be here early to-morrow."

"Ted, you had better wait and see dad first," replied Violet. "He is sure to be in soon. Supposing he objects, eh? It may not then be necessary for you to call again to-morrow."

"Vi," said Edward, "you may now tease me as much as you please. I can bear it. All the same, I think I had better wait and settle with Dr. Tippet—no, I won't call him doctor any longer. I shall say 'dad,' as you do, Vi."

Violet went up to her sister and kissed her. Neither spoke a word. Edward paced the room, which was only dimly lighted by a small lamp.

"Now, Ted," exclaimed Violet, "I can hear dad entering. Go and call him 'dad' to his face, and tell him what you have done."

"What a funny thing courage is," he replied. "I felt a moment ago as bold as a lion. I was going proudly to tell Dr. Tippet what I had done, and now I feel—ahem——"

The little doctor saved Edward the trouble of coming, as he entered the room.

"Edward, you here!" he said.

"Yes. Dr. Tippet," replied Edward.

"Dad," suggested Violet, and then she laughed and tripped out of the room.

"Dr. Tippet," began Edward, and then he paused.

"Well, Edward," replied the doctor.

"I, eh—that is, you, eh—I mean," continued Edward, and then he abruptly stopped.

Words failed, and so he walked across the room, and led Rose to her father.

"Dad," he blurted out, and that was all he said.

The little doctor looked astonished, as he saw the young man with one arm round the waist of Rose, and his daughter's head reclining on his shoulder.

"Bless me!" exclaimed Dr. Tippet, "this is a revelation. I always thought that Violet was the attraction."

"No, Dr. Tippet, or rather dad I will call you, if you will allow me," replied Edward, regaining confidence. "If it had not been for Violet's assistance, I could never have presumed thus far."

"Vi!" called her father.

"Well, dad," replied the girl, running into the room.

"Is this your doing?" he asked.

"Not altogether, dad," she replied; "but I know you are as pleased as I am."

"I will not deny it," said the doctor. "Edward, I do not know any young man to whom I could more confidently entrust the care of my daughter. You may call me dad."

Edward shook the doctor's hand warmly.

"After I have spoken to my parents, dad," he said, "I will, with your permission, bring my mother to see you to-morrow afternoon."

Dr. Tippetts accompanied Edward towards his home.

"Vi," said her sister when they were alone, "I can hardly realise yet what has taken place. I always thought that Edward came to see you, not me. I ceased to call him by his Christian name, because I thought once or twice he was making advances towards me while he was tacitly engaged to you. You are quite sure, Vi, that you are not allowing your unselfishness to mar your life?"

"Certainly not, sis. I am glad that Ted has at last screwed up sufficient courage to declare his intentions. I was afraid I should have to do it for him."

"He gave me a beautiful prayer book and——"

"A ring?"

"Yes. I hope, Vi, it will not be long before you are made as happy as I am."

"Perhaps I am quite as happy now, sis."

"Are you engaged, then, Vi, without telling me?"

"No, you silly girl. Do you think it is impossible for anyone to be happy without being a fiancée?"

"I suppose, for the time being, I do."

The next day Edward came early, and accompanied Rose to the little mission church. He stayed to lunch, and during the afternoon Mrs. Armstrong and Dr. Tippetts, Rose and he, were discussing many things of great interest to themselves, even if they were not of much import to the world at large.

Violet—warm-hearted little Violet—was very pleased that her sister was made happy, the more so as she knew that Edward had the making of a good man in him. But she felt a little sad, a little lonely; and while the others were engaged in conversation, unobserved she slipped out of the house, and went for

a stroll with her dog. Chance (or shall we use another word?) directed her steps towards the only rural walk for miles. It was a narrow road, with lofty trees on each side, forming an avenue of some length, and at the end of it there was a small common. It was not more than three miles from her home. Wrapped in thought, and feeling a desire to be alone, she walked on until she reached this avenue, which was her favourite resort. Her dog, a fine collie, followed her closely, and occasionally looked up into her face, as if he wondered why his mistress was so silent. Once only she paused to stroke Roy's head, and with this he seemed satisfied; so, to vary the monotony of the walk, he chased a cat. Violet seated herself under a large tree, in deep thought.

"Please, ma'am, can you tell me the time?"

Violet glanced up, and saw a pale, haggard-looking man. There was an air of refinement about him and in the tone of his voice which belied his shabby appearance. She consulted her little gold watch, and was about to reply, when the man snatched it away and ran off. Had Roy been with his mistress, instead of indulging in a feline hunt, he would have disputed the act with the beggar.

Violet rose, and walked with hasty steps after the thief. She saw a gentleman in the distance, and so she called out, "Stop, thief!" The man increased his speed, but the gentleman whom he tried to dodge tripped him up, and stood over his prostrate form. The sound of Violet's voice recalled Roy to a sense of his duty, and he came bounding up.

"Miss Violet Tippet!"

"Yes, Dr. Standish; this man has stolen my watch."

It was Lionel, whose steps chance had also directed into the avenue.

The beggar or thief—call him what you will—sat up, and was about to rise, when Lionel forced him down again.

“Give me my watch,” said Violet. “Why did you steal it? Are you in want?”

“Madam,” replied the man, in refined tones, “I much regret this incident. Had I known that you were Miss Tippet, I would sooner have cut off my right hand than have robbed you. With your permission, I will walk to the next police station. I will give you my word of honour to make no attempt to escape. I hope, Lionel Standish, that you will accept the word of a man who was once entitled to be called a gentleman.”

Lionel looked at the man closely.

“Can I believe my eyes?” he exclaimed. “Are you not Lewis Mortimer, of Lock’s?”

“I was,” he replied, rising, and handing Violet her watch. “Madam,” he continued, “I cannot consider an apology a sufficient recompense for my conduct. It will be only one step lower for me if I go to gaol. I deserve it, and, Heaven knows, I cannot be worse off. Dr. Tippet has gratuitously attended me in my illness, and now I show my gratitude by losing all sense of manliness and robbing a defenceless girl.”

Mortimer folded his arms on his breast. His pale face became a shade paler, and his bosom heaved.

“Mr. Mortimer,” said Violet, while tears gathered in her big blue eyes, “I am sure you must be in want, or you would not have risked imprisonment for so small a prize. You have nothing to fear; can I help you? You must be poor and hungry, I know.”

Lionel looked on in silence.

"Madam," replied the wretched man, in a faltering voice, "I had hesitated during my walk whether I should end my miserable existence or do something desperate. I am quite undeserving of all sympathy. The condition you now see me in is the result of my own wilfulness. I am a wreck. What I might have been, what I should have been, Mr. Standish knows ; but what I am you can see. I have squandered alike wealth and health, and in my poverty and disgrace I took a lodging in a squalid neighbourhood. I had but a few shillings left, when an attack of pneumonia laid me low. I was too ill to be taken to the hospital, and Dr. Tippet not only attended me for nothing, but even sent me nourishment. After I had recovered from that, I began to get well, and was able to earn a trifle. Richardson, whom I knew at our 'varsity, has visited me, but has not yet recognised me, as we were only slightly acquainted during our college life. The men I associated with were of a stamp very different from him. Parson Dick, as the people call him, only knows me by the name of Lewis. He interested himself in me, and obtained me some employment at a few shillings a week. I have been a drunkard, and God alone knows the struggles I made after my illness to keep away from the drink shops. For some weeks I succeeded in resisting the temptation to taste alcohol, when I had, in the execution of my daily duties, to call on a clergyman. He saw I looked ill and tired, so he asked if I would like a glass of whisky and water. I told him I was a total abstainer. "Nonsense," he said ; "the good things of this life are for man's use. I am a temperance supporter." He gave me the drink. I said to myself a clergyman

must be right, but this was only to quiet the still, small voice. I drank the spirit. The whole course of my nature seemed set on fire, and I became a drunkard again. I lost my situation, and soon found myself in the workhouse. I quitted it, and had been wandering about for some time, when I again returned to my old lodging, a sober man. Some friends sent me money. Money!—yes—but nothing but money. Ah! what might not one kind word have done even then? I spent the money, shilling by shilling, and again got a little work to do. I went each Sunday to Parson Dick's, and now I recognise you as the Miss Tippet that I have heard sing there. I fell ill. I got worse, and Dr. Tippet said I was suffering from a diseased liver, and could not live long. Yesterday I received a cold reply from those of my own flesh and blood, refusing to send me any more money. I can't want much, nor want it for long. This day I felt a madness come over me, and a strength which I did not know I possessed. I would go out. I dressed, and left my room for the first time for weeks, and wandered down here. The old craving for drink returned, and I felt that I must satisfy it. I have not one farthing, nor anything that can be pledged. I saw you, Miss Tippet, and I determined to beg or steal. Pride prevented my begging—and so I stole."

He uttered the last words slowly, and a ghastly pallor overspread his face. He gave a gasp, and fell down on the road, fainting.

Violet glanced at the poor fellow, and then at Lionel, who stooped down and loosened the scarf which Mortimer had round his throat.

"How shall we be able to get the poor man home?" asked Violet.

"We must find a vehicle, Miss Violet," replied Lionel.

"I can see a carriage coming this way. We must stop it and ask them to help us," said Violet.

A carriage and pair came along at a rapid pace. There was but one person in it—a gentleman. Violet asked the coachman to stop, and went up to the occupant.

"May I ask you to help us?" she said. "A poor man who is ill has just fallen down in a swoon. Will you allow him to be driven to his home in your carriage?"

"What!" demanded the occupant. "Do you think I should allow a tramp to ride in my carriage? Never!"

"And you are a minister of the Gospel," replied Violet, who recognised the individual as a popular Nonconformist preacher.

"Drive on," said the reverend Pharisee to his coachman.

The carriage whirled away. Lionel said nothing, but when his eyes encountered Violet's he could not forbear giving a slight shrug of his shoulders.

"Dr. Standish," she said, "how can I hope that you will again be a Christian in faith—you are one in deed now? I have heard that minister preach against Sabbath-breakers for desecrating the Sunday by excursions to the seaside, and here he is driving out for his own pleasure. How can I expect you to believe what Parson Dick says when you see such specimens of Christians?"

"Miss Violet," replied Lionel, "I am not so given to generalisation as to think that the hypocrites are the real Christians or represent the majority. I have

met with many whose lives are beyond all reproach. I know that hypocrisy has done more harm to your religion than all the atheists and sceptics put together. I can hear another vehicle ; perhaps we may now meet with a Samaritan."

"It is Mr. Smithkins," said Violet. "I know his carriage."

The brewer had seen Violet and her companion, and stopped his carriage when it reached them.

"What's the matter, Miss Tippet?" he asked. "That poor fellow is in a fit, isn't he?"

"He is ill, and has fainted away," replied Violet.

"Lucky, isn't it?" said Mr. Smithkins, "I've got some brandy here in a flask."

Lifting up a cushion, he opened the seat and produced a flask. Lionel poured a few drops down Mortimer's throat, and he revived a little.

"D'ye know where he lives?" asked the brewer.

"Somewhere in Parson Dick's parish, he said," replied Lionel.

"Then we will soon drive 'im 'ome," said Mr. Smithkins. "Parson Dick will know his address. Now, sir, if you'll lend me a 'and we'll lift him in."

The two strong men had no difficulty in placing the spare form of Mortimer in the carriage.

"I'll get on the box with my coachman," remarked Mr. Smithkins, "and, Miss Tippet, you can sit by yourself in the front—see ; and Mr.—eh—eh——"

"Standish," said Lionel.

"Mr. Standish, may be you won't mind sitting beside 'im," said Mr. Smithkins. "If you'd rather sit on the box, I'll look after the poor fellow."

"I should prefer to walk home," remarked Violet. "I hope to see you this evening, Dr. Standish, at

Parson Dick's service. I will send my father to see the invalid."

"I will come to Dr. Tippet directly we have taken Mortimer home," replied Lionel, "and I shall then be able to let you know, Miss Violet, how he is."

They drove away at a gentle pace, and Violet, followed closely by her dog, walked home. Although the day was hot, it was tempered by a gentle breeze, and she reached the house within an hour.

"Vi, where have you been?" demanded Rose. "We did not even know you had gone out. Dr. Standish has just been here to fetch father to visit some man who is very ill."

"How long have they been gone?" inquired Violet.

"About ten minutes," replied Rose. "Edward has gone home with his mother, but he will be back to have tea in our summer-house."

Violet told her sister what had taken place, and the two girls discussed what they could take to Mortimer in the evening. They had scarcely finished assisting arranging the table in the arbour for tea when Dr. Tippet and Lionel returned.

"Well, girls," exclaimed the doctor, "here we are, warm and thirsty."

"How is Mr. Mortimer?" inquired Violet.

"Comfortably in bed," replied her father, "and, thanks to Dr. Standish, he will not be in want of anything so long as he is in this world."

"Is his case quite hopeless, dad?" asked Violet.

"Quite, Vi."

"Is he the patient Parson Dick has promised, if possible, to be with when he dies?"

"Yes, Vi," replied the doctor. "I am astonished

that he had strength enough to walk so far. He said he felt the fearful gnawing pain again come on, and a craving for something to stop his agony. Walking, for a while, seems to have lulled his pain, but he has shortened his days considerably by doing so. Dr. Standish, will you join us in a woman's meal—tea?"

"With pleasure," replied Lionel.

"Edward Armstrong has tried to persuade me that a bachelor's life is not a happy one," remarked the little doctor, while Rose ran into the house, under the pretence of getting another cup and saucer.

"Since most men marry, it may be assumed that he shares a belief very general," replied Lionel.

"And, Dr. Standish, you would like to add very foolish, too," said Violet.

"Perhaps he would speak the truth, Vi, if he did say so," remarked her father. "To cut the matter short, Edward is engaged to my daughter."

"Allow me, Miss Violet, to offer you my congratulations," said Lionel, bowing.

"I accept them, but it would be more to the purpose if you offered them to my sister," replied Violet.

"I beg your pardon," said Lionel, "but I had inferred that you were the object of his visits."

"And so did I," remarked the little doctor, laughing.

"Your logic, Dr. Standish, is again at fault," replied Violet, laughing. "It is possible for people to make mistakes, even if they are great in logic."

"If their premisses are false, their reasoning may be formally correct, but it will be materially wrong," said Lionel.

"I don't know anything about logic," replied Violet. "When I was at school, we went through a primer of logic; but beyond doing what seemed to

me conundrums, I learnt nothing. I suppose even logic can't give one common-sense."

"Learning is no substitute for correct judgment, otherwise called common-sense," said Lionel. "In fact, in a fool, learning only makes him the more conspicuous, like a bright dress on an ugly woman."

"Is my dress conspicuous?" inquired Violet, laughing.

Edward and Rose entered the garden, and their appearance diverted the conversation. Lionel shook his friend's hand.

"Ted," he said, using the familiar name of boyhood, "since it is customary at such times as this to offer congratulations, I will not risk being thought indifferent to your welfare by refusing to acquiesce in what is, at all events, a harmless custom. Whatever may be my opinion of the married state, I will not intrude it at the present moment. I must offer you my felicitations, and congratulate you on your wise choice. That you may realise some portion of the happiness which, I believe, men are wont to imagine is the outcome of matrimony is my wish. Your judgment is sound and commendable."

"But are the premisses false?" inquired Violet, smiling.

"I am afraid experience alone is the test of the truth or the fallacy of such premisses, Miss Violet," replied Lionel, laughing.

"Come and sit down," said Violet, "and since it is customary at such thirsty times to offer people a cup of tea, I hope you will not refuse, as Dr. Standish puts it, to acquiesce in what is a harmless custom by drinking some. Please seat yourselves in the arbour, and I hope you will find these *premises* to your liking."

CHAPTER VII

LIONEL AND MORTIMER

DIRECTLY after the "women's meal" was finished, Rose and Violet went to dress for church, and the three men sat and smoked.

"Our sacred concert, Lionel," said Edward, "begins about half-past seven. We have a short street service at six, and at half-past six we have our usual evening service in the mission church. Perhaps you may like to hear Violet sing? She has a beautiful voice, and I don't believe she is conscious of the fact."

"I intend to call and see how Mortimer is," replied Lionel. "After that, I shall make my way to your mission church. I should very much like to hear Miss Violet sing."

"I will call also and see Mortimer on my road home," said Dr. Tippet. "Here come the girls."

They trooped off to church, Lionel leaving them at the corner of the street in which Mortimer was lodging. It was a narrow road, with a public-house at nearly every corner of the cross streets. Some of the houses were dirty, and the women, not less lacking in the element of cleanliness, were lolling at the doors or seated on the steps. A number of dirty

urchins were playing in the road, and looked up at Lionel in surprise as he passed, as if they thought he was intruding in their domain. He stopped before a house which was scrupulously clean. A card in the window announced that dressmaking was done there. He knocked quietly at the door, which was promptly opened by a bright lad of some fourteen years, who ushered Lionel into the front parlour—drawing-room it might have been called. Not only was cleanliness here again conspicuous, but such taste had been displayed in the arrangement of the trifles that Lionel could see in a moment that the person who had set in order the room had seen better days. Some of the ornaments were not only pretty, but of some value. Instead of large oleographs or gaudy pictures, there were a few well-painted water-colours. The clock on the mantelpiece was of exquisite workmanship.

While Lionel was mentally summing up the history of the family, a woman—nay, a lady—entered. She was attired in plain black, which was almost brown from age, and she stood before Lionel with all the composure and good breeding of a born lady.

“You have called to see Mr. Mortimer,” she said. “He has been in considerable pain, but is much better again now. I am sorry that I was unable to thank you for your kind offer to my son. You had gone before I knew it. He is more than obliged to you, Mr. Standish—Mr. Mortimer said your name was such. I have known better days, but a reverse lost me at one stroke a fortune and a husband. However, I have now much to be thankful for. I have never been in want of a meal of some sort, although times have been hard. My boy, Frank, has nobly helped me. To leave a good school and share poverty with

me was a great trial, but he has shown what his nature is. He has been two years cashier at a grocer's, and I am afraid, but for your kindness, he must have remained such."

When Lionel had come with Mr. Smithkins and Mortimer, the brewer had told something of the history of the fallen man's landlady. She was the widow of a man of independent means who had been prevailed on to invest his money in a company which had been floated by some enterprising men. He lost everything, and in despair had committed suicide, leaving a widow and one child to provide for themselves how they could. This Mrs. Bradford had done for four years by her skilful needle. Lionel had seen the boy, and had offered him a situation in his laboratory as assistant to him, with opportunity for study. The salary he offered was double the amount the boy was receiving. He was studious, and had endeavoured to improve his education under his mother's supervision, which, as far as English and French were concerned, was all that could be desired. He was fond of mathematics, but could get but little assistance in that branch, except through Lewis Mortimer, who had given him an occasional hour of his own spare time when his rent was overdue. Lionel still retained his liking for mathematics, and intended to superintend the boy's studies himself as a recreation.

"I have, through all my vicissitudes, been able to retain a few of my knick-knacks," said Mrs. Bradford. "That clock was a wedding present from my father. I have feared more than once that I should be compelled to part with it, but then something turned up which saved it."

Lionel had glanced at the clock, hence Mrs. Bradford's reference to it. She led the way to the room where Mortimer was lying, and Lionel entered alone.

"Standish," said the sick man, "it is very good of you to come again. Mrs. Bradford tells me not only what you have done for her son, but also for me. I have done nothing to merit this liberality on your part. I insulted you at Lock's when you publicly rebuked me for a breach of etiquette. I don't deserve it, Standish, I really don't. But I must say this, in helping Frank Bradford you are doing a kindness to one who really deserves it. His mother has been very kind to me. Although at times I have owed her two or three weeks' rent, she has never threatened to turn me out. We used not to know much about poor people, how they live and how they die; but I have been struck many times with the way they help each other. It would shame us, who are considered of the upper class. I have been more helped by those who could ill afford it than by those who were rolling in wealth. I shall not cost more than a couple of pounds a week, and that will not be for long, so my friends would not have lost much. I used to mock at religion, but I must confess that I have not in my illness found much consolation in cynicism and atheism. I begin to realise that there is a real religion which one can feel better than understand. I will tell Parson Dick the next time he comes who I am. He is in earnest, so terribly in earnest, Standish, that you can't help listening to him. I should think the apostles must have been made of such as he. The hold he has on people in this neighbourhood is simply wonderful. Would you believe it, there are actually less policemen on duty here now! That says something for his influence, does it not?"

"It does, Mortimer," replied Lionel.

"I am going to have one of my paroxysms of agony," he continued. "I used to curse everybody and everything, but I will try and pray instead now. Parson Dick will come and see me again to-morrow, I know, if you ask him."

For some minutes Mortimer writhed in agony. Lionel looked on in silence. He could not render him any assistance, as he had taken some narcotic a short time previously. There flashed through Lionel's mind as he watched the sufferer several clever aphorisms of agnostic scientists about the indifference which men should show to pain and affliction, but he could not at the moment utter them with any confidence of soothing the invalid; nor could he help feeling that, if religion could not under such circumstances offer any consolation, agnosticism was even more helpless. While Mortimer was thus in agony, the professional nurse arrived, whose services Mrs. Bradford had secured at Lionel's request and expense. Lionel shook Mortimer's hand, and promised to call and see him the next day. He also told him that Dr. Tippetts intended to visit him again after the service at the mission church was over.

If one truth more than any other had been forced on Lionel of late, it was the unsatisfactoriness of living only for oneself. He was pondering as he walked along over the difference between what his life had been during the last seven years and Parson Dick's, and he freely and frankly admitted to himself that his was the least useful, at least so far as others were concerned. He reached the little mission church just as Parson Dick was about to begin his address, and took a seat at the end of the building. There

were but few vacant places. Parson Dick delivered an earnest and impassioned address, brief and to the point, couched in language well suited to his hearers.

"I like to hear Parson Dick," Lionel heard one woman say to another. "He talks as if he meant what he said."

Violet played a short, bright piece on the organ, to allow those who wished to leave an opportunity of doing so before the sacred concert began. No one left, but, on the other hand, several came in, so that not only was every seat filled, but many were obliged to stand.

"I hope that pretty young lady that plays the organ is going to sing," remarked the woman who had spoken previously. "I like to 'ear her voice. I just close my eyes, and fancy I am in 'eaven. I forget all about the wash-tub I've got to stand over from Monday morning to Saturday night."

Edward sang a solo and a duet with Rose, after which Violet sang a contralto solo. Lionel listened attentively, and while doing so he watched Parson Dick, who seemed lost in reverie. Unconscious of the rapt attention of her hearers, Violet sang with great feeling and taste, and had she been anywhere but in a church she would have been loudly encored.

"Bless your pretty face!" exclaimed the washer-woman, aloud, unable to control her feelings. "Sing us something more. Let's 'ave Parson Dick's 'ymn. I beg your pardon, Parson Dick, for speaking out loud. I quite forgot myself."

The last remark was uttered in a very apologetic tone. Parson Dick made no comment, and Violet sang the hymn as requested.

At eight o'clock the music was ended, and Parson

Dick spoke a few words to various members of his congregation.

"Parson Dick," said the washerwoman, approaching him, "I do 'ope I ain't offended the doctor's daughter. I quite forgot where I was. I should 'ave boxed any of my boys' ears if they'd done the same thing."

Parson Dick smiled, and said he was pleased to find that the music was so much appreciated.

"I am pleased to see you here, Lionel," he said, grasping his friend's hand.

"Lewis, alias Lewis Mortimer, formerly of Lock's, would like to see you this evening," remarked Lionel, and then he added how he had become acquainted again with him.

"I will go at once," replied Parson Dick, "and wait until Dr. Tippet comes. I knew he must be a 'varsity man by his speech, but I did not remember him."

Parson Dick walked off at his usual rapid pace, and as Edward was discussing with Dr. Tippet and Mr. Smithkins the composition of the deputation to Canon Paulminster, Lionel chatted with Violet and Rose.

"Well, Mr. Armstrong," said Violet, demurely, when the trio had parted, "have you come to any decision?"

"Mr. Armstrong!" exclaimed Rose; "why do you call Edward so?"

"Because you have often corrected me, sis, when I have said Ted," replied Violet, smiling. "But I will be serious. Ted, what are you going to do?"

"Mr. Smithkins and Mr. Tomlyne have drawn up a paper, which every member of the congregation has

signed, or will do so within a few days," replied Edward. "Armed with this, we four intend to wait on Canon Paulminster."

"And if he refuses to grant your request?" queried Violet.

"We have another plan in reserve," replied Edward.

Edward and Rose walked on, and so Lionel and Violet were again thrown together.

"How did you find Mr. Mortimer?" asked Violet.

"Very quiet and resigned," replied Lionel. "When I left him, however, he was in great pain."

"Poor fellow; I am glad dad has gone to see him. Parson Dick will talk to him kindly. Are you happy, Dr. Standish?"

"I have no reason to be otherwise."

"Reason! Surely happiness is not dependent on reason, is it? I don't think anyone has any reason to be happy, but we are so all the same—at least, at times. I suppose you never feel excited?"

"Not of late years."

"Nor even full of hope?"

"No. Hopes for the future are limited by experiences of the past."

"You have crushed all your emotions?"

"Not quite. I have endeavoured to subordinate my emotions to my judgment."

"Then, before you would allow yourself to be happy, you would have to argue the matter out to yourself, I suppose, so as to decide whether you have any reason to be so?"

"Something of the sort."

"Confess, now, Dr. Standish, don't you feel some contempt for us shallow-brained mortals, who not

only feel emotions, but even allow ourselves to express them? You do laugh, don't you?"

"Yes."

"But you wouldn't allow yourself to cry?"

"I think not."

"Is one emotion more ridiculous than the other?"

Lionel looked at his little companion, and could not forbear smiling.

"I often cry," she continued, speaking rather to herself than to her companion. "When I think of Mr. Mortimer, I feel so sorry for him that I could cry. What a terrible thing it must be to die without any hope of the other world. Do you think, Dr. Standish, that believing in nothing can make one bear pain and the thought of death with any comfort?"

Lionel did not reply.

"If my religion is only a dream or an idle fancy, I would not change it for all the knowledge which science can give. I don't think it would be any consolation to me to know that I was going to dust—to utter extinction. Dr. Standish, the sensation of hunger and thirst are given so that we should eat and drink, aren't they?"

"Undoubtedly."

"The power of thinking that we may think?"

"Yes."

"Then is the intense desire and yearning for a better, a truer, a holier life only given me so that I should be unable to satisfy it? Strong feelings are, Parson Dick says, given to us to lead us to good actions, and I never feel so happy as when I am helping others. I used to be very selfish. I only wanted to please and amuse myself. Many a time have I cried when I have read a pathetic story or seen

a melodrama, but since I have helped in this district I have found how much better it is to help those in need than to waste my feelings on imaginary heroes or heroines. Dr. Standish, although you are a learned philosopher, you are also a man. Tell me, now, when you said you would help Mr. Mortimer, did you not feel some sensation of happiness at being able to help another?"

"Yes, I did."

"I am afraid I am bothering you with my prattle."

"Not in the least. It is quite a pleasure to listen to your unsophisticated remarks."

"I stayed last year a month with an aunt who moves in a fashionable circle. I did not enjoy the visit at all, and I am sure she was equally pleased when I returned home. I was reprovèd all day long. When I feel happy, I laugh and sing; and when I feel sad, I cry. She disliked all exhibition of feeling, and my stately cousins were quite ashamed of me. I am only a wild flower, but I would sooner be that than an artificial one stiffened by wire. You would be pleased with my cousins. I don't think they have any reason to be happy, as they never seem to be. They look on all exhibitions of emotion as vulgar, so they never show it. They never cry, and seldom laugh, although they always try to smile when they have company. I suppose that is how you consider women should act?"

Lionel did not reply in the affirmative. Had he spoken his true feelings on the subject, he would have answered with a negative.

"Are you as happy as you used to be, Dr. Standish?" Violet asked, after a pause.

"No, I am not."

"Learning has not made you happier?"

"Certainly not. Since you question me, I will in return ask you a question. Do you consider happiness to be the goal of life?"

"No, I do not. Parson Dick says we are to do what is right, be the result what it may. Blessedness, he says, and not happiness, is our goal. What most people call happiness is only the sensation of excitement, and this is followed by a corresponding reaction, and those who seek happiness only are alternately elated or depressed."

"Parson Dick is quite right in his judgment."

"I suppose men with big brains have big thoughts and big doubts, so they need large minds to argue out their difficulties, which leaves them no better off than shallow thinkers."

"There is more truth, Miss Violet, in what you say than you are aware of."

"And you have had big doubts?"

"I have."

"Dr. Standish, I am so sorry for you. I hope you will some day feel as happy in a religious belief as I do. In one thing you are like Parson Dick. You both have the word duty ever before you; different paths, but I do believe they both end at the same point. I hope so, and that, after you have fought through your doubts, you will end in belief. I hope I have not hurt your feelings?"

As Violet uttered these last words, she looked up into the face of her big companion and extended her hand. The kind, sympathetic look which the strange girl gave him awakened feelings Lionel did not know that he possessed. He shook the proffered hand, and they continued their walk in silence.

CHAPTER VIII

MISS STANDISH AND HER NIECE

"MA'AM, the door's blowed to!"

"Indeed, Philip. Which door?"

"Master Lionel's lab'rat'ry door, ma'am."

"Well, Philip," said Miss Standish, "I do not see why you need trouble me about it. Surely the door can be opened again."

"There's a spring lock on it, ma'am, and Master Lionel has got the key. It can't be opened until he comes back, and that may be late to-night."

"There is nothing in the laboratory that you want, is there?"

"Nothing as *I* want."

"Does anyone else want anything, Philip?"

"May be yes, may be no, ma'am."

"Come, Philip, don't talk enigmas to me. What do you mean?"

"The fact is, ma'am, Miss Olive Kenyere is coming to-day to do some 'speriments in Master Lionel's lab'rat'ry, and I don't see as how she'll get in there—except through the skylight."

As Philip uttered this there was a slight suspicion of a grin on his face, and he looked at Miss Standish out of the corners of his eyes.

"Ahem!" exclaimed Miss Standish, to check a smile; "I am afraid Olive, with all her masculine ideas, will not care to crawl out of the staircase window and get into the laboratory through the skylight."

"May be, ma'am, you will explain how the accident happened."

"You had better do so yourself, Philip, as I have nothing to do with the laboratory."

Philip left the room, and there was an air of triumph on his face as he walked across the hall. He was about to descend to the kitchen when the front door opened, and Olive entered.

"I have come to work in the laboratory, Philip," she said, in an imperious tone.

Philip shook his head.

"What do you mean?" she demanded, in a sharp tone.

"The door's blowed to, ma'am," he replied, "and it's a spring lock, and Master Lionel has got the key, and he won't be back before to-night."

"How stupid you must be not to fasten the latch back," she exclaimed. "Snakes alive! I will get in some way."

Philip went with her to the laboratory. All attempts to open the door ended in failure. He showed her the only way of entering was through the skylight, with a drop of ten feet.

"Great Scot!" she exclaimed, "what a confounded nuisance it is! What a stupid man you are! If I were master here, you would soon be in want of a situation."

Philip looked at her very angrily as she went to her aunt's room.

"Snakes alive! Great Scot!" he muttered, in disgust. "I hate to hear women play at swearing. If a woman means to swear, let her be honest and have a good swear. I'm a stupid man, am I? One too many for her this time, at all events."

Philip scratched his head, and descended to the kitchen, not dissatisfied with his artifice.

Olive entered her aunt's room in a mood far from amiable, and was greeted by Miss Standish with her peculiar glance over her glasses.

"Aunt," she said, "that stupid man, Philip, has let the door of the laboratory slam, and, as he did not fasten the latch back, he cannot open it."

"Indeed," replied Miss Standish, unconcernedly; "and is it so very important that you should do your experiments at this very moment?"

"Yes, aunt; but, of course, I cannot expect you to feel any interest in anything but cooking and sewing."

"I suppose it is necessary that some people should feel an interest in such matters. Even learned people eat and wear apparel of some sort, don't they?"

"Yes. I suppose those whose aspirations are limited to boiling a pot or darning a stocking must occupy themselves with such trivial matters, but I am not going to waste my life on servants' work."

"No one's life is wasted which is passed in useful work, no matter how humble the task. The only wasted time is that which is devoted exclusively to self."

"I wish I had been born a man. I hate the very word woman."

"Why?"

"Because, being a woman, I am debarred from occupying the position in life I aspire to."

"If, as you say, a woman is equal to a man, why need your being such be any obstacle? You have often complained bitterly that our sex is not placed on a true equality with men. I think if you had been a man you would have curtailed our privileges considerably."

"I would. The only men I admire are those who despise our sex."

"Despise!"

"Well, I mean those who are above all romantic nonsense and avoid women. Lionel treats women as if he pitied our weakness. I am not sure he does not feel also some contempt for us. I should, if I were a man."

"If the women Lionel has met have expressed the same sentiments as you do, I am not surprised that he should feel contempt for them."

"Do you know where Lionel has gone?"

"I believe he has gone to see an old college friend who is ill."

"When will he return, aunt?"

"Not until late, I believe. He dines with Parson Dick."

"A plebeian meal at one o'clock, I suppose?"

"Probably. Parson Dick does not fare much better than his parishioners."

Olive shrugged her shoulders.

"You have met Mr. Armstrong, have you not?"

"Yes, aunt."

"He is engaged."

"To Rose Tippet, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Violet will have to be content with one string to her bow."

"I am not so sure of that."

"Is there another bachelor besides Mr. Richardson in the district?"

"There is one who visits the neighbourhood much of late. In fact, he will be at Dr. Tippet's this afternoon."

Olive started slightly, and endeavoured to cover her discomposure by a well-assumed air of indifference, which would have deceived any man—but not one of her own sex. Women may twist a man round their fingers, and hoodwink him with as much ease as if he were blindfolded. But it is very different with another woman. No woman has ever yet deceived another of her own sex for any length of time with success. Miss Standish noticed the effect of her words on her niece. She had her suspicions—nay, more than that, she felt perfectly certain—that the one man in the world Olive would have condescended to marry was Lionel.

"Lionel was charmed with Violet's singing," continued Miss Standish, after a long pause.

"I can't think how it is that men are captivated by the childish prattle and simple ways of brainless girls."

"I have often heard Lionel say that in electricity the opposite kinds attract each other and the similar ones repel. I don't remember the scientific terms, but you will understand what I mean. In the disposition of human beings I know this is true also."

Olive mused a while, and Miss Standish continued her needlework, occasionally glancing over her glasses, as if she would read her niece's thoughts.

"As I cannot do any work here, aunt," said Olive, "I may as well go for a walk."

"There is plenty of work here," replied Miss Standish, pointing to a heap of material lying near her.

"I have not enough patience for sewing," said Olive, rising.

"I lunch at half-past one. If you care to remain or return, I shall be ready to receive you."

"No, thank you, aunt."

Olive wished Miss Standish good-day, and left the house, walking in the direction of Dr. Tippet's. What her aunt had said only confirmed what she feared might be a possible result of Lionel's frequent visits. She thought it more than possible that Parson Dick would not marry, and, if Violet could secure Lionel by singing a few songs, it would be a cheap capture. She had seen sufficient of men to know how helpless they were when in the power of a woman. She had found the truth of the philosopher's aphorism: "That the man who is not a fool sometimes is one always." Hence she concluded that if a learned man were not a perpetual fool, he would be liable to act foolishly at times; and in the case of feminine entanglements, to be foolish once was enough. Being absorbed in self, she attributed selfish motives to others. Although she had controverted her aunt's statement that marriage was every woman's goal, she knew that it was true. If Violet could not impress Parson Dick, she concluded that she would try her charms on Lionel, who, although a very clever and learned man, was quite unskilled in woman's wiles, and of this fact Olive was not ignorant. She felt at times keenly disappointed when she saw that men preferred a pretty face and a pleasing voice to a woman possessing a well-developed brain and some claim to being considered learned. It seemed to her that women who desired to be married must cultivate those qualities and graces which men seem to wish

for. Without quite endorsing the cynic's assertion "That the quickest way to a man's heart was through a good meal," she saw that most men were not indifferent to domestic comforts and home life.

While thus musing, Olive had reached the residence of Dr. Tippet, and found Rose and Violet busily engaged in gardening.

"I have only just heard, Rose, of your engagement," Olive said, "and I could not pass without offering you my congratulations."

"Thank you," replied Rose, blushing deeply.

"I suppose, Violet, it will not be long before I can congratulate you also," added Olive, with a forced smile.

"You may do so now," replied Violet, shortly.

"Are you engaged also?"

"No," replied Violet, "but you may congratulate me because I am free."

Violet was not pleased with the unexpected visit, and made no attempt to hide her displeasure. She continued planting out some flowers, leaving Rose to bear the brunt of the conversation.

"Can you tell me, Rose," inquired Olive, "at what hour Dr. Standish is expected here?"

"No," replied Rose; "I did not know that he was coming."

"Indeed! My aunt said he would be passing here some time this afternoon."

"If so, it would be to ask my father about Mr. Mortimer, who is very ill. He was a former college acquaintance of Dr. Standish."

"Dr. Standish has promised me the use of his laboratory, and as it is locked, I cannot enter it. I wished to ask him for his key."

"We may go out in the afternoon, but we will ask father to convey your message to Dr. Standish."

"Thank you."

It was now a quarter-past one, and Dr. Tippet lunched at the half-hour. Possibly Olive was aware of the fact, as she chatted with Rose until the gong sounded. Violet had already entered the house, and Rose could not dismiss her visitor without inviting her to lunch, which she readily accepted.

"Dad has sent his carriage back, and says we are not to wait for him, Rose," said Violet, "as he may be detained some time."

There was but little said during the meal, and directly it was finished Violet left the room to finish her gardening. Rose and Olive retired to the little boudoir. It was Olive's intention to protract the conversation, so that she might meet Lionel at the house, and, if possible, persuade him to accompany her back to his home and assist her in the laboratory.

"Has it occurred to you, Rose," she said, "that Violet has already formed an attachment?"

"I used to think so, but I do not now."

"Why have you changed your opinion?"

"Because I have found out that I was wrong."

"I am certain, Rose, that Violet is in love."

"With whom?"

"With a friend of your fiancé."

"You surely don't mean to say that Violet has fallen in love with Dr. Standish, do you?"

"No," replied Olive, with difficulty restraining a look of surprise, "I meant with the Reverend Mr. Richardson."

"Parson Dick!"

"Yes; but why are you so surprised? What

should be more natural? She would make a model parson's wife. Have you never noticed how much interest she takes in his health and in all that he does?"

"Yes, I know that, but I have never thought that Violet was in love with Parson Dick."

"Don't say a word, but watch her closely. Now that you are engaged, you can perhaps more easily assist your sister. Mr. Armstrong might be able to sound his old friend Mr. Richardson. It seems to me that many people miss their opportunities in life through the want of an understanding."

"I will speak to Edward—I mean Mr. Armstrong—about it."

"Yes, do. Mr. Richardson may not be able to read a woman's mind, and just a hint may be all that he needs to encourage him."

Rose did not reply. She had so firmly believed that Edward was in love with her sister that she had no second thought on the matter. Now that she knew she had erred in judgment, there seemed to be some truth in what Olive suggested. Rose was extremely conscientious, and it never occurred to her to attribute anything but disinterested motives to others.

"When is your wedding to take place, Rose?"

"The day has not yet been fixed. Edward wishes it to be in September."

"Well, I hope there may be a double wedding."

Rose looked radiant with pleasure at the thought.

"Mr. Richardson seems to be in feeble health now," continued Olive. "A month in Switzerland would do him much good."

"We are afraid—that is, Violet is—that he may be consumptive."

"Poor girl! She must be awfully anxious about him. What would you feel if Mr. Armstrong looked as ill as Mr. Richardson?"

"I should be very anxious," replied the sympathetic Rose.

"Have you arranged for a duo to be played by Lionel and myself?"

"Edward has put the items on the programme, and will be much obliged to you if you will play the accompaniments."

"With pleasure. I will endeavour to be present at your sacred concert next Sunday evening. Lionel was very pleased with the music."

"If I had known Dr. Standish was there, I don't think I could have sung a verse."

"He is not an exacting critic."

"I am glad to hear it."

"What time do you think Dr. Tippet will return?"

"Probably within half an hour. He may even come back in a few minutes."

"Then, I suppose Lionel will call after Dr. Tippet has returned?"

"Probably."

"Violet is very fond of gardening, is she not?"

"Yes. She has a little assistance from our stable boy; otherwise she does it all herself. She is extremely fond of fuchsias, and has dozens of varieties in the greenhouse."

"I should like to see them, Rose. Let us walk into the garden."

Rose, obedient to her visitor's request, led the way to the dining-room, and through the open French window into the garden. They heard the voice of a man talking to Violet.

"Really, Miss Violet," he said, "I am astonished at your knowledge of flowers, considering that you live in town."

It was Lionel.

He was busily occupied helping Violet. His coat was off and his shirt sleeves rolled up, and was so absorbed in his work of turning over the ground with a fork that he did not see either Olive or Rose.

"Dr. Standish," said Violet, "since you have worked so well, I can't do less than invite you to have a cup of tea. Rose and I have our tea in the summer-house, and if you like to sit down and get cool, I will ask the maid to bring the tea."

Lionel put the fork down and wiped his face. Then he turned round, and for the first time became aware that Olive was looking at him.

CHAPTER IX

MISS STANDISH RECOMMENDS VIOLET

"DICK, you look fearfully fagged."

"I am tired, Edward."

"Come with me to Dr. Tippet's," said Edward Armstrong on the Monday evening. "A few minutes' relaxation will do you a lot of good. I know your work at times must be terribly depressing. When you see how little impression can be made on the masses, I am not surprised that your heart should fail."

"Edward, I do indeed occasionally feel despondent when I see vice and sin rampant; but whenever I am saddest, I have a ray of light beam on me which cheers me on my way. It may be only some trivial word of a child or of an adult, but we live on trifles. Lewis Mortimer cannot live many days, Dr. Tippet says, but I am thankful, oh, so thankful, to see what a change is taking place in him. Sin brought him to misery, want, and disease. Disease has brought him to the brink of the grave, and to a sense of repentance for the past. Poor fellow—a wasted life and an early death; but even in this is seen the hand of Providence."

Edward bowed his head, and was silent for a few moments.

"Dick, Rose sent me down expressly to ask you to come and spend an hour or two with Lionel and myself. We shall have some good music, as Violet and he are going to sing."

"I will accompany you, then, Edward, if it is only for a few minutes."

"Can you come now?"

"Yes. I have just finished my duties for the day. I have not had an opportunity of telling you privately how pleased I am at your choice. I had thought that Miss Violet was the object of your visits to Dr. Tippet's."

"So have several persons. I had no idea I was with Violet more than with Rose so much as to cause our names to be connected."

"I hope Miss Violet may marry a man as good as yourself."

"Or a better one, Dick."

As Edward uttered these words, he glanced into Parson Dick's face, but the latter was looking in another direction.

"I think," observed Parson Dick, as they were walking towards Dr. Tippet's, "a wife is to most men an anchor of religion, and many a man will owe his salvation to his wife's influence. Even a freethinker or disbeliever may be converted by his wife. I am anxious, very anxious, Ted, that Lionel should marry such a woman. He has so many good qualities, and needs but the one good thing—a real belief in a God of mercy and of love, as well as a Creator of all that is visible—to make him such a husband as any woman might be, I won't say proud of, as that is not the right

feeling, but thankful for. If only people, young and old alike, would think of marriage in the right light, how much misery would they save themselves and others. A man should seek in a woman those qualities of which he is deficient, so that she may supplement his defects. This seems to me to be the real secret of a happy married life. The bond should be affection, not passion; the former is steady growing, increasing with time; the latter is of sudden growth, and liable to terrible reactions. The noblest quality in a man is judgment, in a woman it is sympathy, and in their fullest development these cannot exist in any great degree in the same person. For if one is very sympathetic, he is liable to be weak; and if very just, he is apt to be severe. So if the justice of the father be tempered by the sympathy of the mother, the children receive the best training they can in this world. Only in One have the fully developed qualities of man and woman been seen, hence He is the Son of Man, the representative of perfect manhood. Ted, I think when people are married, or even only engaged, it is their duty, within judicious limits, to aid those who are single in arriving at the same state. Lionel needs but the sympathy of a good woman to make him a true Christian in belief. Rose has a sister, and Violet is the one woman I would of all others like to see wedded to Lionel Standish."

Edward started. He firmly believed Violet to be in love with Parson Dick, and he could not think if Parson Dick were in love with her that he would utter such words.

"Dick," he said, "I have wondered why you do not marry."

"I have several reasons for remaining single."

"I can give you many more for getting married."

Parson Dick smiled faintly, and shook his head.

"Dick," continued Edward, "Violet is, next to Rose, the best girl in the world. I can't say more for her, and in justice I will not say less."

Further conversation was interrupted by the appearance of Dr. Tippet on foot, returning to his home.

"Well, Parson Dick," he exclaimed, "I am glad Edward has prevailed on you to spend an hour with us."

When they reached the doctor's house, they heard music, and found Lionel singing, while Rose was playing the accompaniment. Violet was sitting down, and listening or musing. Olive had obtained the key of the laboratory, but the owner of it had refused point-blank to return and assist her in her researches, and the would-be D.Sc. had to go back alone to her work.

"Parson Dick!" exclaimed Violet. "We are surprised to see you come two nights in succession."

She rose as she spoke. Edward watched Parson Dick closely, and thought he saw a nervous twitching of the muscles of his face as he replied to Violet's welcome. His face was slightly flushed, and he held the girl's hand for a few seconds, and looked at her.

"I hope I am not too late to hear you sing with Lionel's 'cello obligato," he said.

"It was too bad of us, Parson Dick," she replied, "but we worried Dr. Standish until he consented to drive to his home and fetch his 'cello. He has not been back long."

"Vi, Parson Dick and I will be the audience,"

remarked Dr. Tippet. "We are both tired, and as he does not smoke, I will smoke enough for two while we listen."

Most of the music was rendered by Violet and Lionel. Rose and Edward did a little, and then retired to a seat at a distance from the rest. The doctor smoked, and occasionally nodded, while Parson Dick listened in wrapt attention.

"Lionel," said Parson Dick, as they were walking to their homes, "Mortimer would like to see you again, and I promised to ask you to come to-morrow, in the afternoon. If convenient to you, I will meet you at his house about four o'clock."

"With pleasure," replied Lionel. "Any time you like to name I can be with you. I shall probably work with Dr. Rayson from nine till two, and directly after lunch I will come to meet you."

"Edward tells me that you have kindly consented to assist at our summer concert. I am glad to add your name to those who sacrifice their time for the poor, and I hope that you may be a constant visitor at Dr. Tippet's. Should it end with you as with Edward, I should be more than pleased to offer you my hearty congratulations."

Lionel looked keenly at Parson Dick as he shook hands, but he made no reply. He walked slowly back to his home, and was surprised to find that his aunt was still in her sitting-room.

"Lionel," she said, "I can see that you are surprised to find me at work so late. It is eleven o'clock, but I had a lot to do. I had made up my mind to do it before I went to bed, and I have done it."

"I can quite believe, aunt, that you would do anything you had decided to do."

"Well, Lionel, in these lax days it is something to have a will of one's own. Philip told me you had fetched your 'cello. Olive did not work many minutes in the laboratory. She said she had forgotten her note-book or something, and went home early."

"I had forgotten all about her when I came for my 'cello. I have left the instrument at Dr. Tippet's, as we shall practise some pieces on Wednesday evening for the summer concert."

"Very good. I am pleased to see you take an interest in Parson Dick's poor parish. He will appreciate your kindness, I know. Music will be a pleasant relaxation after your scientific work, I should think."

"Yes, aunt, it is. I hear from Edward Armstrong that a deputation is going to wait on Canon Paulminster to secure the living of the parish church for Dick. From what I know of that reverend gentleman, they will waste their time. I saw it announced in the paper this morning that the Canon's daughter was about to marry the Hon. and Rev. Felix Fitz-Jones, and, unless I misjudge the Canon, the living will be for his son-in-law, who, although the brother of a peer, has no money, and probably not much brains—but perhaps they would be useless to a curate."

"Lionel!"

"Well, aunt, if parsons had brains, they might think; and if they thought, they couldn't whine through their prayer-book paraphrases, or sermons as they call them."

"Have you ever heard Mr. Fitz-Jones preach, Lionel?"

"No, aunt, nor any one else. I heard him once

snivel in a sing-song style some incoherent expressions. I do not believe there are any men who do their work so indifferently as some parsons. I know there are brilliant exceptions, but some of them are both ignorant and conceited. No layman would have the face to stand up and employ such platitudes as I have heard delivered from the pulpit."

"Lionel!"

"Aunt, I will repeat what I have said. No layman would stand up and employ such platitudes as the ordinary run of parsons do. I should dearly like to read their sermons to them. Let a layman stand up and preach straight to parsons. It would do them good. I am not referring to those of your church only. There was a time, I have been told, when you could go to a dissenting chapel and hear a good sermon, but that day has passed, and my remarks apply almost as much to ministers as to parsons. As I have told you before, aunt, I am only an onlooker in this world, but that is my criticism of them. If a parson can't preach, he might at least learn to read; and if he can do neither, he is not fit for the public position he aspires to occupy. If there were a few scores of Parson Dicks, some influence might be exerted on the masses. As a psychological fact, I can assert that as water reaches its level so do human utterances. A thoughtful discourse which emanated from one brain would penetrate the brain of the listener; an emotional sermon which proceeded from the heart of the speaker would strike the hearts of the hearers; but an indifferent and slovenly essay, badly delivered, only irritates those who are unable to indulge in mental abstraction. It has always struck me that the majority of preachers are lacking

in earnestness. If a man studied science as indifferently as most people do religion, he would soon be left behind the rest."

"I am sorry to say that there is some truth in what you say, Lionel."

"Well, aunt, I have deviated from what I intended to say. I don't believe for one moment the deputation will be able to secure the living for Dick, but I am most anxious that he should continue his work in his parish."

"I am more than glad to hear you say so, Lionel. That reminds me of my nephew of ten years ago, when you thought you would like to be a clergyman, before you followed the higher critics. Lionel, although you call yourself an agnostic, your kindly acts would put many Christians to the blush."

"Dick is my dearest friend, and I would do anything for him. If the general run of parsons were like him, we should hear nothing more of the disestablishment of the Church."

"Surely, Lionel, you don't think disestablishment is possible?"

"Possible, aunt, if not probable. Supposing a politician, to secure the votes of the masses—when taxes are high, wages low, and commerce generally very depressed—put forward on his programme the disendowment and disestablishment of the National Church, promising to employ the funds for the education and the relief of the poor. No school board rate! No poor rate! That would form an eloquent appeal."

"But surely, Lionel, you would consider it a great injustice to divert church money in that way?"

"I might; but do the public generally consider justice? If you appeal to their sense of honesty, you

may appeal to what they have not got; but if you appeal to their selfishness, you are sure of an attentive audience. In political programmes, I have yet to learn that truth and honesty are the first considerations of those who frame them. A politician might fallaciously argue thus: 'The Established Church is the Church of the nation, and so the property of the Church must be the property of the nation; therefore, the Government has the right to dispose of that property in whatever manner it chooses.' But let us return to our subject. I want to assist in providing a church with a stipend for Dick where he is. I know Smithkins will help. I believe he is ashamed of the way in which he has made his wealth by his pot-houses and gin palaces, and would be only too pleased to pay a good round sum for church work, if he thought that by so doing he could bribe the janitor of Heaven. When this deputation has failed, as I know it will, then I will see what can be done. Parson Dick ought to marry."

"But do you think he will?"

"I hope so. There is a girl in love with him, who would make him the best of wives. Dick, noble-minded Dick, has raised many obstacles to prevent his marrying the girl he—shall I say loves?"

"You mean Violet Tippet?"

"Yes, aunt. When he came this evening, I watched his movements reflected in a mirror, and I could see the struggle he was making to overcome his feelings. If he had an income worth mentioning and a church, I believe he would be persuaded to marry. If he were certain that Violet was in love with him, he might consider it his duty to renounce celibacy; if duty, then obligation."

"Lionel, the one young woman in all the world that I have chosen for you is Violet Tippet."

"For me!"

"Yes, Lionel, for you."

"But you know my views on matrimony?"

"Which will change as your views on religion have done."

"I thought at first that Violet was tacitly engaged to Edward Armstrong, but I have quite changed my opinion now. I am certain that she is in love with Parson Dick. Even if I had no fixed views on married life, the knowledge that a girl preferred someone else to me would prevent my making any advance towards her."

"Quite right, too, Lionel. But if Parson Dick decides to make no advance, I hope you will, later on, take my advice. Do you intend to let Olive have access to your laboratory at all times?"

"I do not desire it."

"But will you make any effort to prevent it?"

"I do not like to tell her not to come. At the same time, I should be better pleased if she did not."

"Supposing Parson Dick should marry Violet, and also supposing you should feel any desire to marry, would Olive be to your taste?"

"Olive!"

"Yes, Olive."

"No, certainly not. If I should ever contemplate matrimony, I should certainly marry a *woman*."

"Then, you consider Olive too masculine in her temperament to please you?"

"I do. But why did such an idea occur to you?"

"Many girls have found that music leads to matrimony, even if it does not end in harmony, and

at the present day it may be that some women think that science is the road to win a husband."

Miss Standish glanced over her glasses at her nephew as she said this. She rose, and wished him good night.

Instead of retiring, Lionel went to his study and sat down, and smoked and mused a few minutes, when Philip entered.

"I have locked up all the doors, Master Lionel," he said.

"Very well, Philip. I shall smoke here for a few minutes."

"She has been again, sir, but she ain't done no work; only just made the lab'rat'ry in a mess. I have been more than an hour cleaning it up."

"Thanks, Philip."

"May be, Master Lionel, you would give her a hint to clean the apparatus after she has done her 'speriments."

"I must leave the hinting to my aunt, Philip."

"Wasn't I right, Master Lionel, when I said you'd better be out when she called?"

Lionel laughed.

"She won't be above asking for a duplicate key for your lab'rat'ry, sir, mark my words. Then I reckon she will want a latchkey to the front door, and then——"

Philip paused.

"Well, Philip, what then?"

"What then, sir? Why it will be all up with you."

Lionel laughed again.

"Mark my words, sir, it won't be no laughing matter for you."

Philip shook his head ominously. As the faithful

old servant only echoed his aunt's opinion, Lionel, for the first time, began to realise that there might be some grounds for their warnings.

"Did Miss Olive say what time she was coming to-morrow?"

"No, she didn't say, Master Lionel, nothing about it; but she knows you will be with Dr. Rayson until lunch, so I reckon she will come about that time."

"I have an engagement soon after lunch, so I shall not be able to work in my laboratory to-morrow afternoon."

"That's the sensiblest thing I've heard you say, sir, for many a day. You leave her to Miss Standish and me, Master Lionel. We'll settle her business."

Philip wished his master good night, and left him to his own reflections.

Lionel continued to smoke and think. The great research in which he was engaged in connection with Dr. Rayson absorbed less of his mind than the conversation with Parson Dick and subsequently with his aunt. He was going on Thursday for a walk with Parson Dick, and he would use every argument in his power to prevail on his friend to alter his decision. He would approach Mr. Smithkins with regard to the building of a permanent place of worship for Parson Dick, and do his best to secure for him some stipend. He had some shares in a water company, and these he would place in trust for the church. Although Lionel was still unable to reconcile religion and science, he was not so blind nor so prejudiced as to deny that men like Parson Dick were of great assistance to the poor; and he had had the truth demonstrated to him more than once which Parson Dick had some years before asserted: "That if going

to church did not make some people better, staying away certainly could not ; and if all places of worship and Sunday schools were closed, society would rapidly degenerate." He had met with few—in fact, only one man—who abstained from public worship, preferring to study the Scripture quietly by himself. Others, who loudly stated that they preferred to study religion in the open fields, usually ended by spending their Sunday in nothing but pleasure, and not infrequently in vice.

CHAPTER X

THE DEPUTATION

"DOCTOR, me and Tomlyne thinks you had better open the ball with Paulminster," said Mr. Smithkins, as the four, who constituted the deputation, were driving to the residence of Canon Paulminster.

"Very well," replied Dr. Tippet, "I will do so, and if I fail for words, Edward, I shall expect you to help me."

"With pleasure," replied Edward Armstrong, "if you will tell me what words you want."

"If, doctor, you can't square the matter with the Canon," observed Mr. Smithkins, "let me try what the effect of a cheque for four figgers will do. I'll wrap it up nicely. His daughter is going to get married, and it may be that a thousand pounds wouldn't be a bad wedding present."

"By no means, Mr. Smithkins," replied the doctor. "That was all the money I had to start life with."

"There's one more ought in it than I had when I entered into the brewery line," said Mr. Smithkins.

They alighted at the door of the Canon's residence. It was opened by a surly man, who asked them what they wanted.

"Our business," said Dr. Tippet, haughtily, "is with Canon Paulminster, and not with his footman."

"Canon Paulminster is engaged," replied the surly lackey, "and if you want to see him you will have to wait."

"Then we will wait," said Dr. Tippet.

They were ushered into a small room, and left to stand or seat themselves as they chose.

"*Tel maître, tel valet*," observed Edward to the doctor.

"This is what I call cheek," exclaimed Mr. Smithkins. "We wrote to Paulminster, and he arranged the day for us to come, and then that surly flunkey taking such airs on him. If it wasn't that it might spoil the polish on my boots, I'd kick him. Drat his impudence!"

They waited for some minutes, when the same man told them to follow him. They did so, and found the fashionable preacher seated in his study. He did not even rise, but made a movement with his hand, signifying that they were to be seated. There was silence for a few moments, and, since the Canon did not speak, Dr. Tippet rose.

"We have called," he said, "on behalf of the congregation of our parish church, to ask you, sir, to kindly consider our petition that the Reverend Mr. Richardson may be appointed as successor to our vicar. Mr. Richardson has, by his unstinted self-denial and energetic services, gained the respect and, I may say, the affection of his parishioners, and we most earnestly desire that he may remain with us. With the poor he has worked so much and so well that our mission church is crowded."

"Then it would be a pity that he should leave it," remarked the Canon, frigidly.

"I am glad you think so," replied the doctor, "and as the living is in your gift, it needs but the word from you to prevent Mr. Richardson leaving the parish."

"I may as well be frank with you, Dr. Tippet," said the Canon. "I have no intention of appointing Mr. Richardson to the living. Perhaps it can be arranged that he may continue as curate-in-charge of the mission church, but that, of course, will depend on the next vicar."

"Do you mean to say, Canon Paulminster," exclaimed Mr. Smithkins, "that you won't appoint Parson Dick to the parish church? Here is the petition signed by over a thousand people!"

"If it were signed by a million it would not affect me," replied the Canon, haughtily. "It is doubtless very kind of you, gentlemen, to be anxious to secure your friend an income of six hundred a year, and he will appreciate your efforts."

"Mr. Richardson is not even aware of our efforts on his behalf," said Dr. Tippet. "He would be the last man to be influenced by pecuniary considerations."

"So much the more to your credit for your disinterestedness," replied the Canon. "I have already offered the living to one whom I consider best fitted for the parish, and I do not think I need detain you any longer. In fact, I regretted acceding to your request to wait on me, as a deputation will have no influence on my decision."

"Look here, Canon Paulminster," said Mr. Smithkins, "let me make your daughter a 'andsome wedding present of a cheque for a thousand pounds, and then you've only to give us your word that you'll appoint

Parson Dick—that's what we call Mr. Richardson—to the parish church."

"I should think that would be a very good investment for your money," replied the Canon, sarcastically; "for a thousand pounds to receive six hundred a year!"

"It ain't no investment for me," said Mr. Smithkins, angrily. "I ain't going to get nothing out of it. I've made my pile."

Canon Paulminster shrugged his shoulders, and rose and rang a bell. The surly footman reappeared.

"Good day, gentlemen," said the Canon.

Dr. Tippet, Edward, and Mr. Tomlyne rose to depart.

Mr. Smithkins approached the writing-table behind which Canon Paulminster was standing.

"I suppose you call yourself a minister of the gospel, a clergyman," said Mr. Smithkins, banging his fist on the table. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

The brewer would probably have said more, had not Edward seized him and dragged him away. They re-entered the carriage, and as they drove off, Mr. Smithkins began to express his indignation in burning words.

"Fancy such a poker-backed man as that preaching the gospel!" he said. "Who could listen to his teaching when he won't even receive men courteously? Let him appoint his son-in-law, and I can promise him an empty church. If Parson Dick will stay, he shall have a church, if I pull down one of my best-paying pubs to build it on. Six 'undred a year income, eh? His son-in-law won't have no six 'undred if Miss Standish and me drops our subs., and

not a farthing of mine shall go to him. Perhaps when he said I was going to make something out of the transaction, he judged me by his own standard. I don't deal in livings."

The others remained silent, but Mr. Smithkins continued intermittently to express his indignation in unmeasured language. After leaving Dr. Tippet and Edward at the doctor's home, the two churchwardens drove on to discuss the matter alone.

Violet met her father at the door.

"Dad," she said, "you have not succeeded?"

"No, Vi," he replied, "we have not; and had I known the disposition of the Reverend Canon, nothing would have induced me to wait on him."

"I met Dr. Standish this morning," said Violet, "and when I told him where you had gone, he said at once he feared you would be disappointed. Dr. Standish is going to call this afternoon to hear the result of your interview with Canon Paulminster."

"It was very brief," remarked Edward, "and I was exceedingly pleased to be in the street again. I must confess that I did not expect such scant courtesy. I have heard Canon Paulminster preach several times, and was delighted with his sermons. Nothing would induce me to sit under him again."

"Then, Ted," said Violet, "there is no hope that Parson Dick will be appointed to succeed Mr. Roger-son?"

"None, Vi; absolutely none."

"Can't we raise enough money to build him a church in the slums?"

"That is possible, Vi," replied her father. "Mr. Smithkins, I know, will put down a big cheque. I will do my best also."

"And so will I," added Edward.

"And Vi and I will put down our mites," said Rose, who had just joined the group in the hall.

"I wonder if Dr. Standish would help also?" observed Violet.

"I am sure he would," replied Edward. "I will ask him."

"We must not be too hasty in our movements, Edward," remarked Dr. Tippet. "Even if we secured a site and built a church, we should require the new vicar's permission and the bishop's sanction. These may be withheld. Under any circumstances, when we have obtained the promise of the necessary amount of money to commence a building, we must get the requisite permission."

"If Canon Paulminster's prospective son-in-law is as discourteous as the father-in-law, we may consider the matter settled, without going any further," remarked Edward.

"Parson Dick will be terribly cut up if he is obliged to leave his poor parishioners," said Violet.

"Yes, that he will," assented the doctor. "Come, Vi, don't let us at present take too gloomy a view of the matter. We will do our best to secure a church for Parson Dick, and I have no doubt we shall succeed. If we can obtain the permission, I feel confident that we shall be able to raise the amount of money."

Dr. Tippet left them to make his round of visits; Edward had to return to his office; Rose had gone to visit Edward's mother; and Violet, being alone, went into the garden and sat down, surrounded by the flowers she loved so much. She was in a deep reverie, when she heard footsteps, and, looking up, saw Lionel crossing the lawn.

"I hope I have not disturbed you, Miss Violet," he said. "I was told that you were in the garden, and I thought you must be, as usual, tending your flowers, so I said I would come to you. I have called to ask what is the result of the deputation to Canon Paulminster."

"What you said it would be, Dr. Standish," replied Violet. "He was very discourteous."

"The Canon is seldom otherwise to those he considers his inferiors," said Lionel, "although he will toady to any extent to those who can assist in his promotion to a seat in the House of Lords and a mitre. He has absolutely refused?"

"Yes."

"And intends the living for his future son-in-law?"

"Yes."

"I suppose that is quite natural?"

"Yes, Dr Standish, it is *natural*, but not *spiritual*. I do think that congregations should have some voice in the choice of their vicar."

"I quite agree with you, Miss Violet; but while church patronage is what it is, I am afraid you are not likely to be consulted. Your new vicar is very advanced in his views, I believe."

"Is he? It seems hard that a congregation should have thrust on them anyone a patron chooses. It is as equally unpleasant for a Low-church man to be thrust on a High-church congregation as it is for us to have a ritualist placed in our parish church. I don't pretend to offer any opinion as to which section of the Church is right—perhaps the Church of England is broad enough to admit both."

"From what I have known of candidates for holy

orders," said Lionel, "I believe that the thirty-nine articles are as easily moulded as clay to suit their views. They assent when they cannot consent. My own opinion on the subject was that both extremes were scarcely honest in their profession. Now I do not trouble myself. If the Church should be disestablished, it seems to me that it will happen through internal dissension rather than external pressure. Mr. Rogerson is a typical representative of the clergy of the old school, when they were gentlemen and scholars, whatever else they lacked."

"And you don't think they are either now?"

"In very many instances I can say I do not. Not only in the Church, but amongst dissenters, instead of religion having leavened business, business has penetrated religion, and the pulpit is not so far removed from the counter as the words might imply. It does not matter what place of worship one enters, the preachers seem to devote more time to asking for money than to preaching the gospel. I remember hearing a cynic once remark 'that if all those who obtained money under false pretences were prosecuted, many a preacher would fare badly.'"

"Neither Mr. Rogerson nor Parson Dick are guilty of asking for money often. We are going to try to raise enough money to build Parson Dick a church in his slums, but dad says we shall need the permission of the new vicar before we can do anything. I think you said you knew Canon Paulminster's son-in-law—or rather the clergyman who is to be such?"

"Yes, I do."

"Is he affable?"

"Yes, very."

"Do you think he would give the requisite permission?"

"As the church would be amongst the poor, I believe he would."

"May I ask a favour of you?"

"Yes, Miss Violet, you may."

"I wish—that is, we all wish—very much to know if you would, as you are acquainted with the vicar-designate, see him, and ask if he might be inclined to grant out request."

"I will go with pleasure, and as I was correct in my last surmise, I hope I shall be equally so in this, which, I believe, will be an affirmative."

"We shall be so much obliged to you, Dr. Standish. It is indeed very kind of you."

"Parson Dick is a very dear friend, and I should be pleased to do all in my power for him. As I have nothing to do, and I believe that Fitz-Jones, your vicar-designate, is in town, I will go at once, and on my return I will let you know the result of my visit."

Lionel rose and quitted the doctor's house, walking at his usual rapid pace. Being accustomed to long walks, he seldom employed any other means of conveyance than shanks' pony. An hour after starting, he was in the west end, before the temporary residence of the Reverend Felix Fitz-Jones. He was shown into an ante-room, where he waited his reverence's appearance, which, when it became visible, was very un-reverential, for Felix Fitz-Jones was attired in whites, with a blazer, and smoking a large pipe.

"Standish," he said, "I am delighted to see you. Sorry to keep you waiting, but I was just changing the japan for whitewash as I am off to a tennis tournament. What brings you in this direction?"

"If I shall make you unpunctual, Fitz-Jones, I will walk in the same direction."

"I am in no hurry for half an hour, as I shall drive. You know, I am about to get spliced. Not a bad sort of girl at all; and as she will bring an income of some six hundred a year, I think I am in luck's way. Canon Paulminster has the patronage of a living up your way, and the vicar has been good enough to be ill and resign."

"It is in connection with that I have called."

"You don't mean to say, Standish, that you are giving up your erratic views, and want to be japped? If you want a title, I shall be delighted to have you as a colleague."

"Thanks, Fitz-Jones, but that is not the object of my visit. An old college chum, Richardson, is at present curate-in-charge of a mission chapel attached to your parish in presumption. Several friends are willing to find the money to build him a permanent church in the place of the temporary iron building, if permission will be given to him by the new vicar. His church is quite in the slums, and a good mile from the parish church."

"I shan't have any objection at all, Standish. I don't care for district visiting, and I don't feel at home in the slums, so I shall be very thankful if he will take the charge of the district. I have not yet seen the parish church, but I believe it is an eyesore. Are there any good tennis clubs in the neighbourhood?"

"I can hardly say, as I do not play tennis. I am as fond of cricket as when I was a boy, although I have not handled a bat for some time. In tennis, I am too fond of making boundary hits."

"As soon as I am settled in my new diggings

with my wife, I shall hunt you up. You are not married, of course?"

"No, I am not."

"And not likely to be? It seems to be the right thing for a parson to get married. I don't like giving up my liberty, but I suppose sooner or later it has to be done. I have had a very snug crib for the last three years. I have been curate in a country parish, with plenty of good families in the neighbourhood: boating and garden parties innumerable, fishing, and some very good shooting. Duties very light; only one week-day service. My father-in-law that is to be is going to put me up to a few dodges in sermon-making. He is a dab hand at preaching. I generally get mine from some old sermons of my late respected father. Great Scot! I did make an ass of myself one Sunday. I had been out rowing all the Saturday, and was so fagged when I returned that I had no inclination to read over my father's sermon, which I usually do, so as to get some idea what it is about. I took the MS. into the pulpit, and read it off straight away. The next day, one of the girls with whom I often play tennis met me. Says she, 'You must be older than you look, Mr. Fitz-Jones.' I answered that would depend on how old I looked. 'I did not think you were fifty.' I told her I was not. 'Then,' said she, 'why did you refer in your sermon to something you had seen forty years ago?' I roared with laughter, and confessed the truth to her."

Felix Fitz-Jones laughed heartily at the recollection of the joke.

"Then, Fitz-Jones, I may consider it a settled matter that you will raise no objection to Richardson being perpetual curate of the district church, if the money is raised to build him a permanent edifice?"

"Certainly, Standish. I am very pleased to oblige Richardson and myself at the same time. He likes the work amongst the poor, and I don't, and there's the end of the matter."

The Rev. Fitz-Jones accompanied his friend to the door, and then drove off in a hansom, while Lionel walked back to tell Violet the result of his interview.

CHAPTER XI

OLIVE KENYERE BECOMES INTERESTED IN PARSON DICK'S CHURCH

OLIVE KENYERE was a determined woman. What she attempted she seldom failed to achieve. Whether the result was worth the exertion might be questioned, but of her will there could be no doubt. She had for years determined to marry Lionel, and this was one of the reasons which prompted her to graduate in arts and science, under the impression that a learned man would prefer a learned woman for his companion in life. She felt now that she had cause to doubt the accuracy of her judgment in the matter, as she sat and pondered over it in a pleasant little villa at no great distance from Lionel's home. She had taken apartments in the neighbourhood, to see more of him, and also to gratify her vanity and ambition by becoming acquainted with the great scientist, Dr. Rayson. There were two impediments to her accomplishing her design on her cousin.

That Lionel said he would never marry, and that he objected to the restraint of married life, did not deter her for one moment. Most men say the first before they enter the matrimonial state, however silent they may be on the latter point after. The

first great impediment was Miss Standish, whose influence over Lionel was almost as great now as it had been in his boyhood ; the second was Violet. In Miss Standish, Olive knew that she had a woman quite as determined as herself, and she was also perfectly aware that her aunt would exert all her influence to prevent Lionel from marrying her. Olive did not, however, by any means despair of creating a breach between aunt and nephew. She could wait, as she had waited ; and she would wait. With regard to Violet she was less sanguine. If Parson Dick did not marry Violet, she felt certain that Lionel would. It made her enraged when she thought of it. That a man should prefer a half-educated girl, because she had a pretty face and could sing, to her, a woman with a brain equal to the best of men, was a very humiliating thought. Violet, she said to herself, could never understand the workings of Lionel's mind nor enter into his life's labour. She could and she would. As she cast a glance into the mirror which she faced, she could not see that even in personal attraction she was inferior to her rival. She was tall, while Violet was short ; she was fair, and her rival dark ; her features were well formed, while Violet's were not regular. Why was it that even men of brains liked childish ways and a baby face ? Bah ! It disgusted her. In music she was superior to Violet—in her own estimation, if not in that of others. Certainly she could render music which Violet would not attempt. In what, then, was she inferior to her rival ? What accomplishment did she lack which Violet possessed ? None, absolutely none.

There was one thing which Olive was not aware that she lacked, simply because she did not need it.

Olive lacked the most valuable grace which nature has given to women. She was destitute of sympathy. Violet, on the other hand, was very sympathetic. Sympathy is an influence which one unconsciously makes felt in another. Olive neither desired nor exhibited sympathy. She could utter words of sympathetic import, but they fell as coldly on others as they rose in her own cold nature.

Olive had learnt through Rose of the failure of the deputation, and of the success of Lionel's mission to the Hon. and Rev. Felix Fitz-Jones. Parson Dick must be provided with a church and an income, and, still further, with a wife—Violet. Olive could not quite decide whether Violet was really in love with Parson Dick, or if she merely felt a woman's sympathy with a religious work done in a self-denying way. Be that as it might, she felt that if Parson Dick proposed, Violet would not refuse. Olive was nothing if not practical. She had heard Lionel say that he was prepared to give a thousand pounds towards Parson Dick's church. Knowing that brewers are invariably liberal supporters of churches, she decided to make an early call on Mr. Smithkins, so as to set the ball rolling. She had met him several times, and even if she had not, she would not have stood on ceremony. To decide and to act were almost simultaneous with Olive. She rose, and in a few minutes was walking towards the brewery, where Mr. Smithkins was to be found most mornings. She had timed it quite correctly, and not only found the brewer in his office, but disengaged also.

"Mr. Smithkins," she began, "if you are at liberty for a few minutes, I should like to consult you, as you are one of our churchwardens."

"Cert'ny, ma'am," he replied. "Won't you take a seat?"

"I have heard that your deputation to Canon Paulminster has turned out a fiasco."

"Well, ma'am, if being treated like dirt and refused point blank is fiasco, you've 'it it to a turn."

"My cousin, Dr. Standish, has obtained a provisional assent from the Rev. Fitz-Jones, the vicar-designate, for Mr. Richardson to be curate-in-charge of the mission church until it can be made into a distinct district. We are all very anxious that some effort should be made to secure Parson Dick, as he is called, a permanent building, and the present we consider is a most opportune time for raising the money. Very many of the parishioners—in fact, I think I may say all—will be very disappointed at the failure of your kind efforts to procure the appointment of Mr. Richardson to the parish church, and when they know that a list has been opened to build him a church among the poor, they may be disposed to give liberally. I shall be pleased to give my mite. We think you are the man to bring the suggestion to a successful ending."

"It's very good of you, ma'am, to say so. I am ready to start the list with a thousand, and I'll find another thousand if it's wanted. Parson Dick's an out-and-outer, and he shan't be in want of a church if I can 'elp it."

"Then, Mr. Smithkins, if you start the list at once, I feel sanguine of your success. May I call on a few friends and say that you have opened the subscription list with a magnificent donation, and invite them to communicate with you?"

"You may, ma'am."

"I will ask my aunt, Miss Standish, to hunt up her numerous friends. I have no doubt that the Misses Tippetts will also help us."

"There ain't no Mrs. Tippetts. She's been dead nigh on ten years."

"I mean the daughters."

"The Miss Tippettses? They'll 'elp. They're good 'uns, both of 'em. Ain't that Miss Violet a pretty gal? My stars, she can sing! If I was a young man, I'd often be down that way. It's struck me that Dr. Standish don't miss many days but he calls there. He can't do better, that's what I think."

From this view Olive emphatically dissented, although she did not express her thoughts. It irritated her that the names of Lionel and Violet should be united by a common man—a brewer—and that he should have the impertinence to give an opinion on the choice of her cousin added to the annoyance.

"Miss Violet Tippetts is very assiduous in her work in Mr. Richardson's district. Has it never occurred to you that Parson Dick might marry some day, especially if he had a church and a stipend which would warrant his having a home?"

"Parson Dick won't never marry. Mark' my words. He ain't no marrying man. If he did, he couldn't do better than 'ave Miss Violet. I don't say much, but I see more than most people think, and I'd lay ten to one that Dr. Standish marries Miss Violet—that is, of course, if she'll 'ave him."

Olive did not accept the wager, but there was a slight curl of her upper lip, which did not escape the notice of the brewer. As she had no desire to prolong the interview, she wished Mr. Smithkins good

day, gushingly, and continued her walk to Dr. Tippet's.

If even a casual visitor had noticed Lionel's frequent visits to the little doctor's, she knew they must have been still more marked by Miss Standish and Dr. Tippet. She had every reason to believe that her aunt would favour an alliance between Lionel and Violet, and she had no reason to doubt that such would be equally acceptable to Dr. Tippet, as sons-in-law with five thousand a year, or more, are not to be found every day.

When Olive reached the doctor's, she was shown into the girls' room, where she waited very impatiently for some minutes. She was glancing on the table, and a letter met her gaze. She recognised the writing at once. It was Lionel's. She longed to open it. Violet entered.

"I am afraid I have kept you waiting," she said, "but I have been so busy in the greenhouse and garden that I was unfit to receive visitors. Rose is cooking, as usual."

"I am sorry to disturb you," replied Olive, "but knowing how much interest you take in Mr. Richardson's work, I have some news for you."

"We are much obliged to you."

"I have seen Mr. Smithkins, and he has started a list of subscriptions for a permanent building in Mr. Richardson's district. He has headed the list with a thousand pounds. I am going to see what I can do among my friends, and I am sure you will do the same. My aunt has promised that she will give fifty pounds. If we all use our energies, we shall be able to raise a sum sufficient to commence the building in a very few weeks. Lionel has said that he will have pleasure in adding his name and a cheque."

"Dad has been discussing in what way we can assure Parson Dick remaining in his district. He says we must provide him with a church. So we shall be able now to consider the suggestion as feasible. I thought we could build a church on the present site, but dad says a road is going to be made where that is, and, under any circumstances, we must quit our present place in about a year's time."

"The more need, then, to secure a suitable site at once. Do not let me hinder you in your gardening. I hastened here to tell you the good news, and now I will return."

"I have finished, thank you. Dr. Standish sent me this morning some foreign plants which he had brought home with him from Japan, and I have been planting them in the greenhouse as he directed me in his note."

Olive considered that information as explaining the contents of the letter lying on the table. After a few more remarks, she left Violet and went to Lionel's house.

"No, ma'am," replied Philip, in answer to the question if Lionel were in. "No, ma'am, he ain't, and I don't know when he will be back. He did say as he was going for a long walk with his old college friend, Parson Dick."

"I suppose he has left his laboratory open for me?" she demanded.

"That's more than I can say, ma'am."

"Surely you can go and see, or I will go myself."

Philip moved aside to allow her the second alternative. She brushed by him, and found the door locked.

"Have you the key?" she demanded.

"No, ma'am, that I haven't."

"I must ask your master to get me a duplicate key. I waste so much time in fruitless journeys."

The front door opened, and Lionel entered the hall.

"I am awfully delighted, Lionel, that you have come back, as the lab. is locked," said Olive, smiling, as she took Lionel's hand with unusual warmth for one of her cold nature.

"I was going with Richardson for a walk, but he is unable to go to-day, and so we have postponed the outing until next week."

"A most fortunate contretemps for me, Lionel, as I can claim your assistance for the time."

Lionel followed her into the laboratory. Philip looked after them, and shook his head.

"I should very much like an introduction to Dr. Rayson," Olive said, as they entered the laboratory. "Even on the Continent his name is almost a household word—at least, amongst scientific men. I should like to spend all my time in original research. I wonder you do not, Lionel. Your contributions to scientific journals are so numerous that your name is already known, especially in conjunction with Dr. Rayson. I sometimes think that it is as much your theory as his."

"No, Olive, it is entirely his. I have made suggestions, and we have discussed many points together, but that is the limit of my assistance."

"Are you succeeding?"

"I hardly like to express an opinion at present. We have learnt much, but there is a chasm which we are obliged to bridge over. We still require one link in the chain."

"You are sanguine of success, are you not?"

"I was."

"But are you not now?"

"I cannot say that I am, although Dr. Rayson still hopes to succeed. I have met with learned scientists of all nations. In each branch I might be able to name one equal to Dr. Rayson, but I have never yet seen one who has such depth of learning. He has a giant intellect."

"He has, and I almost worship him. What is greater than mind?"

Lionel did not reply, but mused for a few minutes.

"Has Dr. Rayson given any name to the force he has found?"

"I can hardly say that we *have* found it, although we have approached very nearly to our goal. He calls the force Vibios, a hybrid word, as you see. While he readily admits that a plasma may be the origin of all organism, from the simplest form of life to mankind, he firmly believes the vital principle that pervades all plasma, in which what we call life exists, must proceed from some external force. He does not believe that life can arise spontaneously in plasma. It needs a principle or an influence which produces the phenomena of life. What is that influence? Vibios. What is Vibios? Is it matter of any description? He gives an emphatic negative to this. Vibios is not more material than gravitation or electricity. It is only an energy or an influence which has the power of pervading matter and exhibiting in it life. Vibios will exhibit the phenomena which we call electricity, magnetism, gravitation, chemical action, etc., according to the conditions under which it acts. Vibios has existed from all time

and in all space. We have learned many wonderful truths in our researches, and even if we do not succeed in proving our hypothesis, we shall at least add much to scientific lore, so that our time will not have been wasted. I was talking to Richardson about it, and he summed it up in a few words."

"What did he say? Quoted a few texts, I suppose. I should no more look to the Bible for scientific information than I should to Shakespeare for a dissertation on the *calculi*."

As Olive uttered these words, she shrugged her shoulders.

"Parson Dick said," replied Lionel, thoughtfully, without having heeded her words or noticed her actions, "that Vibios emanated from God. That He was the Creator of all life."

"The proof?" demanded Olive.

"He said it was revealed, because we cannot find it out by any mental process."

"We *will* find it," said Olive, with characteristic determination.

"I doubt it, and I think Dr. Rayson himself is less sanguine than he was. It is rumoured that he is to be knighted. Not that any handle to his name will add to his reputation."

"But everybody likes to be recognised. I should like to make some great discovery. Can you suggest anything to which I can devote my attention?"

"Yes. If you wish to render conspicuous service to your sex, find some remedy for their idleness. The curse of the present age is the laziness in women of all classes, or, perhaps, the want of occupation for them. Some suffer from the latter, but more from the former. When I have been down in Parson

Dick's district, I have been struck with the number of women lolling about their door-posts instead of cleaning their homes. How can one expect that men will not frequent the public-houses when their own homes are so dirty and uncomfortable?"

"You had better suggest that idea to aunt or Violet Tippet. It would be more to their taste than mine. I intend to devote my life to something better than visiting slums."

"Better! The noblest work that any man or woman can do is to benefit their fellow-creatures!"

"Certainly, but one is at liberty to choose one's own way of doing it. I will appeal to the minds of men."

"And women?"

"There are but few women who possess a mind."

"I cannot say that I agree with you there. If women unduly develop their brains, the next generation will suffer. Woman's life, as Parson Dick often says, is a constant exemplification of the law of self-sacrifice. The mother who has indulged her desire for study by great mental efforts has done so at the expense of her children. Bacon's mother could not have written his works, but she could give birth to a son who did."

"Really, Lionel, you are degenerating into a preacher. We shall see you next a poor curate in a slum."

"If I were, I might then be following an unselfish life."

"Do you consider that a man, then, who gives up his life to scientific research is a selfish man?"

"That depends on the motives which prompt him. If he works to benefit others, he is as much a

philanthropist as if he were a Parson Dick ; but if, on the other hand, he only desires to acquire glory and to be considered a clever man, he is acting from motives which are purely egotistic."

"The same, I suppose, may apply equally to the motives of those who are occupied in slums or in religious works?"

"Yes."

"I called on Mr. Smithkins this morning," said Olive, abruptly changing the subject, thinking it would be a suitable opportunity.

"What for?"

"To suggest to him the advisability of at once starting a subscription list for building Mr. Richardson a church. He has promised to do so, and has put his own name down for a thousand pounds. I cannot give much, but I shall have pleasure in adding my name for five guineas."

"I am delighted to hear you say so. I did not know that you took any interest in church work."

"That depends on circumstances. I told Violet Tippet what was being done, and she was in ecstasies. She seems very much attached to Mr. Richardson's district, and, perhaps, to him also."

"If Dick were to marry Violet, he would choose the best woman in the world."

Lionel uttered these words with such enthusiasm that they reached the ears of Miss Standish, who had just entered the hall.

"I am glad to hear you say so, Lionel," she said, at the open door.

Olive felt angry, but concealed her feelings under a smile which deceived Lionel, but not her aunt. The lunch bell sounded. Olive accepted her aunt's invitation, and the three sat down to the meal.

"I have just seen Violet," remarked Miss Standish, "and she has told me that you have had an interview with Mr. Smithkins, Olive."

"Yes, aunt."

"We do not, of course, wish Parson Dick to know anything about the matter until we have collected some five thousand pounds. I think we had better act quietly at present, and when Parson Dick is away for a holiday with you, Lionel, we can act more publicly in the matter. I think you, and you alone, Lionel, may be able to persuade him to give himself a rest for a few weeks. Take him to Devonshire for a walking tour. You are both fond of walking."

"I will use all my persuasive eloquence."

"If you should fail, Lionel," said Olive, "there is one other person who might succeed."

"Who is that?"

"Violet Tippet."

As Olive uttered these words, her eyes encountered those of her aunt, who glanced at her over her glasses. They understood each other. Lionel did not notice the action.

CHAPTER XII

FELIX FITZ-JONES AND PARSON DICK

PARSON DICK was seated in his little room. It was at once dining-room and study. Before him lay some paper, on which he had made a few notes. He never read his sermons, knowing how much force was lost by being obliged to keep his eyes on the manuscript. He carefully thought out his subject and made a few notes, which were sufficient to reproduce his thoughts. He took great pains to keep his language suited to his hearers, and, although he possessed the qualities which make an orator, he repressed his feelings, lest his audience might be more pleased than edified, fearing that he might preach his own glory and neglect that of his Master. From time to time he looked up from his work and glanced through the window at the gin palace opposite, and a sigh would escape his lips as he saw not only men, but women and children, constantly entering the tavern. Many frequenters, he knew, could not afford the amount they spent in drink, even if they were only moderate drinkers. It meant that their homes must suffer in consequence.

He leaned back in his chair, and remained in deep thought for some minutes. A gentle tap, and, in answer to his invitation to come in, Violet entered.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Violet," he said, "but I thought it was the maid bringing in my tea."

"I hope I am not disturbing you, Parson Dick, in your work?"

"I have quite finished. I was out visiting this morning, and so I have been obliged to prepare my evening lecture now. I see you have the account books. Has all the money been spent?"

"Rose asked me to bring them, as she was going out with Ted. These are the amounts disbursed in district visiting, and here is the balance."

"Your balance exceeds your capital."

"Yes. Some one, who did not wish the name to appear, has given five pounds."

"It was very good of Lionel."

"How did you know it was Dr. Standish?"

"Because everyone else has given so liberally that I could not ask them to give any more."

"How do you know that it is not Mr. Smithkins?"

"Because he always sends a cheque."

"I have not yet said that it was Dr. Standish."

"I will not press you on the point, but accept with all thankfulness what we receive. I wonder that I have not often offended Mr. Smithkins. I have repeatedly asked him to close the tavern opposite on Sundays, and put a man in as manager who will endeavour to prevent drunkenness. I can hardly expect him to close it entirely, as it is valued at some thousands."

"Is any sacrifice too great for good works?"

"No, Miss Violet, certainly not. Each person should be prepared to ask himself to make even great sacrifices, but I do not feel that I am warranted in demanding too much at one time from others. If the

British were not such drunkards, I could support those who only ask for moderation, but that word, unfortunately, has no binding force on the majority. They must drink deeply or not at all; so I cannot hesitate to plead loudly for the latter."

A girl brought in a tray, which she hastily placed on the little dining table and left the room to answer a knock at the door. Miss Standish entered.

"Parson Dick," she said, "I think we are going to have a thunderstorm. It is just commencing to rain, so if I shall not disturb you, I will wait until the storm is over. I have several things to talk to you about. I am afraid you let some of your people impose on you."

"I will endeavour to act with more judgment," replied Parson Dick.

"Fiddlesticks!" exclaimed Miss Standish; "you are no match for some of these perpetual beggars. You had better let me take charge of your district funds. They will not impose on me twice."

"I shall be very much obliged to you if you will take charge of the accounts."

"I called on Mrs. Tupper a few minutes ago only. They are supposed to be in the utmost poverty. There were three children eating dry bread and drinking water. Poor little dears! After I had left them, I discovered that I had left my sunshade, and so I returned unexpectedly. Their meal had undergone a change. On the table was a large teapot, a jug of milk, and a basin of sugar, and a large cake! I told that woman what I thought of her."

Miss Standish frowned, and looked over her glasses. Violet smiled.

"One is apt to err in judgment sometimes," observed Parson Dick.

"Yes," replied Miss Standish, "and I think Mrs. Tupper erred in judgment when she thought she could impose on me."

Violet laughed, and even Parson Dick could not forbear smiling.

"Parson Dick," continued Miss Standish, "I shall not be able to return home for my five o'clock tea. Violet, I am sure, is also ready for a cup."

"If you will accept such frugal fare as I can offer," said Parson Dick, "I shall be pleased to offer you a cup of tea. If I get a cake, I hope you will not censure me as you did Mrs. Tupper."

As he said this, he smiled and left the room. The girl came in a few minutes with two cups and saucers, some plates, with a few slices of bread and butter, also a basin with sugar in it.

"Where is the milk?" demanded Miss Standish.

"Parson Dick has gone to get some, ma'am," replied the girl.

"Doesn't he have milk as a rule?"

"Mr. Hunter, the milkman, always brings him an 'aputh, but then he gives that to Mrs. West for her baby; that's all, ma'am."

"Humph!" ejaculated Miss Standish.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, ladies," exclaimed Parson Dick, as he entered with a jug of milk and a cake. "Bring some more hot water, Jane," he said.

"What for?" inquired Miss Standish, as she poured out a cup of tea.

"I thought, perhaps, you might like more than one cup of tea."

"Cup of what?" demanded Miss Standish. "This is slops. Tea indeed! You won't want any hot

water, except to wash the cups in. Bring some *tea*, Jane."

The landlady entered with another teapot at that moment.

"I thought, ma'am," she said, "that you would not care for such weak tea as Parson Dick drinks."

"Quite right, too, Mrs. Hurst," replied Miss Standish. "Now, Parson Dick, do you take sugar in your tea?"

"No, thank you. I think it spoils the flavour of tea."

"If it spoiled the flavour of the slops you drink, you ought to be much obliged to the sugar."

Violet laughed outright, and Parson Dick smiled.

"Do you know the secret of making good tea, Parson Dick?"

"First the water should quite boil, and then the tea should be infused for three minutes, after which it should be poured into another vessel and——"

"Thrown down the sink," added Miss Standish, looking over her glasses, but there was a merry twinkle in her eyes as she did so. "Fiddlesticks! To make a cup of tea, you must put enough tea in the pot. That is the whole secret of the matter. I am right, am I not, Violet?"

"Yes, Miss Standish."

Parson Dick laughed.

"I am afraid my tea things are reduced to a harlequin set," he remarked, as he saw Miss Standish eye his ill-assorted articles.

"I suppose," she said, "you had a complete set once."

"I am afraid that these three articles suggest that I have had three sets."

"Broken?"

"I have every reason to suppose so. That must, of necessity, be the fate of all crockery ware, as it would never wear out. One branch of industry, at least, is supported by accidents in the kitchen."

"Fiddlesticks!" exclaimed Miss Standish. "If you were a manufacturer of earthenware goods, it would be very well to talk like that. If the maids break my tea things, I talk to them. They don't care, so long as they do not pay for them. I have one set of tea cups and saucers that I always wash myself. They were my mother's, and are still intact."

"I cannot lay all the blame on others," said Parson Dick, "as I occasionally break a cup or a plate myself."

"Now, Parson Dick, I want to talk to you," said Miss Standish. "Lionel would very much enjoy a good tramp over Exmoor and Dartmoor, and he wishes you to accompany him. What date shall I fix?"

"Do go, Parson Dick," said Violet, "it will do you so much good."

"I should like it very much indeed," he replied, "but I hardly know how I can get away."

"I am not going to take any refusal, Parson Dick," said Miss Standish. "If you don't fix the date, I shall. I am a very determined woman, as you may have already found out."

"Who will discharge my duties while I am away?"

"I have found a *locum tenens* for you, who will take your place during the month of August. Many of your parishioners will be away for their holidays at the time—hop-picking."

"Quite true, Miss Standish. May I ask who it is that will kindly undertake my duties?"

"Yes, you may; and when I mention the name of Mr. Browney, you will know that you have one who will do his best."

"Mr. Browney! That dear old gentleman! He was my father's intimate friend. He has retired, has he not?"

"From his living, yes; but he spends most of his time now in helping those who labour in poor parishes, and cannot afford to pay a *locum tenens*, or guinea pigs, as Lionel used to call them."

"Miss Standish, I shall now be pleased to go with Lionel to Devonshire for a few days."

"Very well. I will arrange the date for you which will be convenient to Mr. Browney. That is settled, now."

These last words Miss Standish uttered emphatically, as if the decision were as unalterable as the laws of the Medes and Persians.

The storm came on, and lasted for about half an hour, after which the sun shone again brightly, and Miss Standish and Violet left Parson Dick.

"Mr. Richardson, I believe?" said a gentleman, as he entered a few minutes later.

"That is my name," replied Parson Dick, in answer to the words addressed to him.

"My name is Fitz-Jones, and I have been appointed to the parish church. I have called to have a chat with you. My friend, Standish, said he thought you were willing to retain the charge of this district."

"I shall be delighted to do so, if possible," replied Parson Dick, who had not at first noticed that Fitz-Jones wore his collar the wrong way round, the only indication that three letters (Rev.) should be prefixed to his name. His attire of dark tweed did not suggest

that he was the rector-elect of a large and important parish.

"Well, Richardson, there need be no fuss about it. You are willing to remain, and I am willing that you should remain. I shan't interfere with you. You can follow on what lines you like. My predecessor is a Low-church man. I am High-church generally, but I can accommodate myself to circumstances. I had a turn in a slum for a few weeks, but I couldn't stand it. Excuse my smoking. Will you have a cigar?"

"No, thank you; I do not smoke."

"Indeed. If I were here, I should smoke all day to cover the ill odours of this neighbourhood. There is everywhere about here a mixed odour of paraffin oil and stale fish. Let me see, what was I saying? By the bye, I saw a jolly pretty girl with an old lady come out of your diggings. Who is she? Does she play tennis? But there, I must not ask those questions now, as I am about to get married. Are you a good preacher?"

"I do my best."

"Standish raves about you. He says you preach as if you believed what you said. Rather hard on some of us. My prospective father-in-law is a splendid beggar. He gets invited all over the place to preach for special offertories. He can fetch the money out of people's pockets. How do you manage to keep this place going? I know that in most of the slums it is very difficult to get the money to pay the 'x's.'"

"Kind and generous friends come forward and help with their services, with their money, and, what is most valued of all, with their sympathy and prayers. I believe Almighty God blesses the efforts of all those who work earnestly and honestly in His service."

"Yes, yes, of course. I had forgotten that."

"Forgotten!"

Parson Dick looked keenly at Fitz-Jones; aye, and sternly too. Fitz-Jones fidgeted.

"I could not labour here," continued Parson Dick, solemnly, "did I not believe that God had called me to the work. I could not continue here, did I not believe that He was helping me in the work. I cannot understand how men can enter the ministry without feeling a desire to carry out the duties of it, and to give themselves heart and soul to the service of the Master. We have a great and a solemn responsibility in directing men and women to live a holy life. It is a fearful thing for any man to lightly undertake these duties and to discharge them indifferently. I am now going to my little church. Will you help me in the service?"

For the first few moments Fitz-Jones was offended. He looked at Parson Dick, with an angry reply on his lips. He saw before him the pale and worn features of a good man. The most casual glance at Parson Dick showed one that he was an earnest man. A second glance, and the hollow cheek, with hectic flush, and the bright blue eyes, proclaimed the fact that Parson Dick was on the brink of the grave. While Fitz-Jones gazed at him, Parson Dick had a violent fit of coughing, and he sank into a chair afterwards, deadly pale and exhausted. Fitz-Jones was flippant, but he was a good-hearted man, and needed but the touch of a living coal from the altar to make him into a good man.

"Richardson," he said, kindly, "you do not seem well this evening. Can I take the service for you or help you?"

"I shall be pleased if you will help me," Parson Dick replied, faintly.

Fitz-Jones had made a great sacrifice. He had arranged to go to the opera that evening, and, as he was passionately fond of music, he had exhibited an unusual act of self-denial in volunteering to help Parson Dick.

Although it was only a week-day service, followed by a men's Bible class, there was a good congregation. Fitz-Jones read the shortened service, and was surprised to see the number of men who came to the Bible class. There were more than a hundred *men*! Parson Dick had studied the manners and customs of the East, and, having visited the Holy Land and Egypt, and stayed there for some three months, he had improved his knowledge by observation. He had found there the key to many difficulties in the Bible, his knowledge of Hebrew enabling him to read the Old Testament in the original and retranslate portions which do not always convey a clear meaning to the ordinary reader. Aided by diagrams and large pictures, he made the lectures interesting and instructive; but it did not end here, as he always closed with some practical advice to his hearers. The men were invited to question him. On this occasion the remarks of Fitz-Jones diverted him somewhat from his set subject, and he dwelt on the calls of God to men for special services. He commenced in his quiet, clear, sympathetic voice; but, as he warmed up to his subject, his face became flushed and his language powerful. When he dwelt on the great responsibility of all ministers, on the account which they must give of the way they have discharged their duties, Felix Fitz-Jones felt uncomfortable, and

he returned home that night realising for the first time what he had promised to do at his ordination. Had he ever made any effort to fulfil those vows? This was the question his conscience asked him repeatedly.

CHAPTER XIII

VIOLET'S SECRET

"EDWARD, I have watched Violet closely, and I really cannot be sure that she is in love with Parson Dick."

"I feel certain of it myself, Rose."

"But she will talk freely of him and to him."

"Do you consider that a certain indication that her affections are not fixed?"

"Yes."

"It was in your case?"

"Yes."

"I believe that Lionel is more than pleased with Vi."

"I don't think that Vi cares for Dr. Standish."

"There is one way, Rose, of finding out."

"By asking?"

"Yes. When you are alone, you might sound her on the subject. I should like to see her engaged to some good man."

"Do you consider Dr. Standish a good man?"

"You mean, I suppose, can I consider an agnostic a good man?"

"Yes, Edward."

"I believe, Rose, there are three causes for scepticism. The first is a sinful life. Men who

deliberately sin against the dictates of their conscience know that if there is a world to come, with a heaven and a hell, that the former cannot be their goal, so they will deny all future existence. The second cause is conceit. Young men, and even old men too, think it very clever to sneer at religion and to vow that they are atheists. The same rail against doctors and medicine, and affect to despise them. Let them be ill, and they cry frantically for both doctor and parson. I knew a man—not a young one—who sneered alike at religion and doctors. He was taken seriously ill. Immediately both an allopathic and a homœopathic doctor were summoned.”

“What is the third cause of scepticism?”

“The third arises in men with big minds, and most often with a big amount of learning as well. Possibly their doubts arise from their knowing too much to accept received doctrines, and not enough to answer their own questions. I think such men often attempt to find out more than the human mind can grasp. I believe that is the rock which has wrecked Lionel's faith. For such as he I can only feel pity. He has never lost the heart of a Christian nor the sympathy of one. I only hope that his mind will some day return to what it was, and that he will be a Christian in name as well as in deed.”

“Could you recommend Vi to marry Dr. Standish?”

“I could and I would, if I were sure that Dick and she are not attached. I believe the influence of a Christian woman would be more likely to bring Lionel back to his early faith than any arguments.”

“Supposing that Dr. Standish's influence should cause Vi to waver in her faith?”

"I cannot suppose such a thing, for two reasons. If Vi were like Olive Kenyere, B.A., B.Sc., a mixture of learning and conceit, I might share your fear. Lionel, I am sure, would not utter a syllable to disturb anyone's creed. He said to me one day, science had no substitute to offer which could in any way take the place of religion, particularly in a woman. He respects a consistent Christian. I remember, as if it were only yesterday, although seven years have since passed, our last conversation in Lionel's room at college. He said to Dick—'It is not that I *will not* believe, but I *cannot*.' One cannot much wonder if men of thought do become sceptics so long as some professors of divinity—Nonconformists as well as those of the Established Church—openly endorse the extreme views of the Higher Criticism. I should like to know how they can square the opinions they express with the Thirty-Nine Articles or with those of any Christian church or sect. They boast of their learning and of their critical acumen, and treat all who decline to accept their conclusions as deficient in intelligence. These critics differ considerably in the extent they go. Some do not exceed the bounds of legitimate inquiry, while others decline to believe in all miracles, and practically manufacture a Bible and a creed for themselves. As Parson Dick says, a Christian must accept at least two miracles—the birth and the resurrection of Christ. These being granted, others are possible."

"If these critics cannot believe in the tenets of their Church, why do they not secede from it?"

"That is a question often asked, but never answered by them. I have not yet had a chance of sounding Lionel on this subject since his return, but

I know that Parson Dick will not let a favourable opportunity pass of talking to him."

"Edward, I often think if there were but one thousand men like Parson Dick in our Church, what a difference there would be."

"There would," assented Edward Armstrong.

"Rose, Miss Standish is here!" exclaimed Violet, bursting into the room.

"Yes, Rose, here I am," said Miss Standish, following Violet into the room. "We have had tea with Parson Dick, and I think he has had the taste of tea for the first time for many a day."

"Miss Standish has ordered for him a set of tea things," added Violet. "Parson Dick said his present ones were a harlequin set. He has only a big breakfast cup that is cracked, a small saucer of a different colour, and a plate that matches neither. His teapot was minus half the spout."

"At college," remarked Edward, "he was equally indifferent to such things."

"I have called to see Dr. Tippet about one of his free patients," said Miss Standish.

"Dad hasn't come in yet, has he, Rose?" inquired Violet.

"He has been in once, and has gone out again," replied Rose. "Can I give him any message, or will you wait?"

"I can't wait, child," replied Miss Standish. "I must go home and see that my nephew has a good dinner. I have at last removed all obstacles, and Parson Dick is going with Lionel for a tramp over the Devon moors in August. I shan't ask you, Mr. Armstrong, to accompany them, as men who are about to get married are never interesting companions to their own sex."

"We shall want Parson Dick to tie the nuptial knot first," replied Edward; "and if I am not an interesting companion to my own sex, I hope at least one of the other sex will find me so."

"Very pretty," said Miss Standish, "very pretty. I wonder if you will talk like that in ten years' time?"

"I hope so," replied Edward, smiling.

"I hope not," said Miss Standish. "Nonsense in young people may be excusable, but not in later years. No fool is so bad as an old fool."

"Are you discussing me?" exclaimed Dr. Tippet, with a laugh, as he entered at that moment.

"I have heard, Dr. Tippet, about one's putting on a cap if it fitted," replied Miss Standish, looking over her glasses and smiling. "But enough of nonsense. I want to talk to you for a few moments."

Dr. Tippet and Miss Standish left the room. Violet seated herself at the window.

"I am glad that Miss Standish has succeeded in persuading Parson Dick to take a holiday," remarked Rose.

"And so am I," said Edward. "I went with him once on a walking tour some three years ago. I enjoyed it, but as I am not a good walker, I get terribly fagged. He can walk some twenty miles a day with ease, and so can Lionel. They are very well matched as far as walking is concerned. Perhaps Dick may have some opportunity of converting Lionel to the faith he used to hold."

"Do you think that possible?" inquired Violet.

"Yes, Vi, and more than that, I think it quite probable," replied Edward; "but I must now return home, or my respected father will lecture me for lack of punctuality."

"Can't you stay to dinner, Ted?" inquired Rose.

"I can't, I am sorry to say, as there are several shippers going to dine with us, and so I must return."

Later in the evening the two girls were alone in their room, working and chatting. The evening was fine and warm, and the odour of Violet's flowers was borne through the open window by a gentle breeze. As one looked on the garden, in which were several large trees, it seemed hardly credible that they were but a few yards from one of London's slums.

"Vi," began Rose, and then she paused.

"Well," replied Violet, "I am listening intently."

"Now that I am engaged, I should like to see you engaged also."

"You would not, then, if you were not engaged?"

"Vi, I didn't mean that. What I wish to say is that, now I am so happy, I should like to see you engaged also to some good man."

"Good men are scarce."

"The more reason that you should not refuse one if he made an offer."

"Perhaps I shall not do so."

"I am glad to hear you say so. Answer me a straight question, Vi. Are you in love with Parson Dick?"

"Why do you ask me such a question, sis? It is only a few days ago that you thought I was in love with Ted. Now it is Parson Dick, and later on it may be Dr. Standish."

"Vi, you know I only want to make you happy."

"I do, sis. Now, answer me a question. Have you thought I was in love with Parson Dick, or has someone else suggested the idea to you?"

"If I expect you to answer my question, I must

answer yours, I suppose. It has been suggested to me."

"By Olive Kenyere?"

"Yes."

"I thought as much."

"But she suggested it so kindly."

"Fiddlesticks! as Miss Standish says."

"Olive was really very sympathetic, and seemed quite anxious about Parson Dick's health. See what trouble she is taking with regard to his church."

"Fiddlesticks again! I can see through her, although I have not graduated either in science or arts. Olive Kenyere has set her cap at Dr. Standish, and she wishes to see me engaged to Parson Dick, or anyone else, so that I might not be an obstacle. She was awfully angry when she saw Dr. Standish helping me in the garden. She can usually hide her feelings, but that time they escaped her vigilance, and she was—what she very rarely is—natural. I kept Dr. Standish in the garden as long as I could, purposely to tease her. I beg you, sis, never to mention my name with Parson Dick's, please. If ever a good, kind, loving sister's help is needed, I promise to come to you at once."

"I am so glad to hear you say so, Vi."

"And, sis, if Olive Kenyere again expresses an interest in my affairs, refer her to me. I shall never believe that she would trouble about anyone but herself, unless she had some object in so doing."

"If you had heard, Vi, how kindly she spoke, I think you would change your opinion."

"I am sure I should not. I am certain in my own mind that Olive desires to be Mrs. Dr. Standish."

"Do you think she is in love with him?"

"No, sis, I don't. Olive doesn't love anyone except herself. It is ambition and pride, not affection, which prompts her."

"Do you think Dr. Standish is in love with Olive?"

"No, I don't. He is not so selfish as Olive is, but at present his brain is too much occupied in attempting to solve impossible questions to have any leisure for listening to the dictates of his affections. He would have to analyze his feelings first, and possibly write some chemical equation, before he could decide if he were really in love."

"Don't you think he might use his microscope?" asked Rose, smiling.

"If he wished to examine the affections of Olive, he would need it, and a very powerful instrument, too."

Rose laughed.

"You do not like Olive, Vi?"

"No, sis, I don't. I won't make any bones about it, to use another of Miss Standish's expressions. When she was pupil teacher at our school I disliked her, and I do so still."

"Don't you think it is wrong to hate another?"

"I don't hate her. I have a very strong aversion to her society, that is all. I don't hate toads, but I don't wish them near me. I will be extra pleasant to Dr. Standish for the future to tease her."

"But supposing you should make another suffer by doing so?"

"Who is that other?"

The name of Parson Dick was on Rose's lips, but she restrained herself. Perhaps Violet might have formed an attachment to Dr. Standish!

"You have not answered my question, sis."

"I do not wish to name anyone; but supposing that such were the case?"

"Do you mean Olive?"

"No. I meant—that is—I wish to know——"

"What do you wish to know?"

"If there is anyone you care for, Vi."

Violet made no reply, and as Rose felt that she was very clumsy in endeavouring to find out what she wished to know, she did not refer to the subject again that evening. She was conscious also that Violet was fencing with her questions. They worked on in silence for some time, when Dr. Tippet entered their room and took his usual seat and smoked. The girls did not object to his doing so, as the pleasure of his society more than counterbalanced any antipathy they might feel to the odour of tobacco.

"Do you wish for music, dad?" Violet asked.

"Presently, Vi."

"You look tired, dad."

"I feel so. I should have been home earlier, if I had not been detained by Mr. Smithkins. He has opened a list for subscriptions to build Parson Dick a permanent church. The difficulty will be to find a convenient site which will not take all our money. I suggested that he should pull down that big gin palace opposite Parson Dick's lodgings."

"What did he say, dad?"

"He scratched his head, and remarked that it cost some eight thousand pounds."

"He could very well afford that amount if he chose."

"I should think so. He must be worth at least a hundred thousand pounds. I said it joking, but the

site is really a good one, as there is a large yard in the rear, and room enough to build not only a church, but a Sunday school, a working man's club, and a house for Parson Dick as well."

"How much would it cost for all these, dad?"

"I can hardly say, Vi. Ten thousand pounds do not go far in building."

"Not if Mr. Tomlyne is the builder; but could you not find someone who would do it cheaper?"

"Yes, Vi; but Tomlyne never scamps his work. I know his price is high, but you need not be afraid that what he has done will want repairs immediately, as often happens. To buy the 'Seven Stars' and build a church and school and vicarage would cost more than twenty thousand pounds."

"I am afraid we can never hope for that amount, dad."

"I am afraid not."

"Then, what are you going to do, dad?"

"Possibly pull down a few small houses, and put up the nave of a church to begin with. We shall not do much until Parson Dick is away for his holiday. Personally, I desire that we wait until we see how much money we may reasonably expect, and then it will be time enough to choose the site and get out our plans."

"I wish I were rich," said Violet. "I would buy the 'Seven Stars' and put up all the buildings, and then I would pull down all the slums and build model lodging-houses. It would be a great step if the people would only wash themselves and their children. Miss Standish went into a house the other day and found all the children very dirty. She asked the mother why she did not wash them. She said she

hadn't a basin, and couldn't afford to buy soap. Miss Standish looked over her glasses at the woman. Then she went out and bought a wooden tub and some soap, and waited while the woman washed the children. She is just the lady we want in our district. I don't know how it is, but no one ever contradicts her. Everybody seems obliged to obey her—even Parson Dick."

"Miss Standish is the most sensible woman I have ever met, and she has a kind heart, too."

"Now, dad, I will sing to you for a few minutes, and then you shall go to bed very early."

Violet sat down and played a few bars, and was just about to commence one of her father's favourite songs, when there was a loud peal at the bell and a succession of very emphatic knocks. Dr. Tippet rose, and stood near the open door of the little room, to hear who it was that required his services.

"Is Dr. Tippet in?" asked the deep-toned voice of a man.

"Yes, sir," replied the maid.

"I want to see him at once."

Dr. Tippet had entered the hall, and Violet, pale and trembling, stood near the door listening, as if she feared some bad news.

"My name is Fitz-Jones, Dr. Tippet," began the visitor. "I am to be vicar here in a few weeks. I have been to see Richardson this evening, and I assisted at his services. When it was over, he had a violent fit of coughing, and brought up a quantity of blood. I have managed to get him to bed, and have driven up at once for you. My cab is waiting. Can you come immediately?"

"Yes," replied the doctor, seizing his hat.

"I am afraid Richardson is seriously ill," said the Rev. Fitz-Jones as he opened the street door.

Dr. Tippet and he drove rapidly away.

While the conversation was taking place, Violet clung to the door for support. Directly her father had left, she tried to reach a chair, but in attempting to cross the room she fell down and fainted.

"Vi," exclaimed Rose, "my darling Vi. You do then love Parson Dick!"

CHAPTER XIV

FITZ-JONES AND THE CANON'S DAUGHTER

THE next day when Feliz Fitz-Jones arrived at the palatial mansion of Canon Paulminster, the carriage and pair of that humble follower of the despised Nazarene was standing before the door. In the drawing-room, Clementine Paulminster was waiting for Fitz-Jones.

"Felix," she exclaimed, petulantly, "you have kept me waiting!"

"I am sorry, but it was not my fault, Clementine."

"Whose, then, I should like to know?"

"I went last night, Clementine, to see Richardson, who has the charge of the mission church connected with my new parish."

"Well!"

"He was taken ill directly after the service, and so I volunteered to help him this morning. In fact, I have promised to take his duties until he is better."

"What! Are you not going to accompany me to your aunt, Lady Brightfield's, garden party?"

"I am afraid I cannot."

"Cannot! You shall. I am not going to be disappointed for the sake of a few dirty people. They

can wait, and I cannot—and I will not. The carriage is at the door. Why do you wear that black frock coat instead of your dark tweed?"

"Because it is more in accordance with my vocation."

"Come, Felix, we will go at once."

"I have told you, Clementine, I cannot."

"Do you really mean to say, Felix, that you persist in refusing to accompany me? You disappointed me last night when you sent that note saying that you were assisting Mr. Richardson at his evening service. Are you going to disappoint me again?"

"Clementine, I am very sorry to disappoint you, and in doing so I disappoint myself equally. Could you have seen how ill Richardson looked last night, you would have been the first to suggest that I should relieve him of his duties."

"Surely it cannot make much difference if some of his services are discontinued for a few days. How can I go without you?"

"My mother will accompany you, and explain the reason of my absence. I will drive with you to her."

"Papa will be here in a few minutes. I must talk to him before I decide. I am sure that he can send someone to take Mr. Richardson's place without your going. I have quite made up my mind that you shall go with me, and I will not be disappointed."

"Clementine," said Fitz-Jones, solemnly, "I have never passed such a night as I did last night. I have never before understood how indifferently I have discharged my duties. I have never before realised my responsibilities. Conscience has spoken at last, and in such a way that I dare not continue to carry out

my work as I have hitherto done. I cannot make up for lost opportunities. The past is irreparable, but I have the present, and it may be that I shall have the future to labour earnestly, to do my work more faithfully and more zealously."

"This is, I suppose, what is called sudden conversion?" remarked Clementine, with a slight shrug. "I thought those words were obsolete in the Church of England."

"Will you drive with me to my mother?" he asked, after a pause.

"No, Felix, I will not. If you are not going to the garden party I will not go. Don't let me detain you any longer. Some of Mr. Richardson's poor parishioners may be waiting to receive their weekly dole to buy soap with."

"Clementine, do listen to me. Surely you must know that a parson should be prepared to make some sacrifice?"

"Then sacrifice your desire to help Mr. Richardson, and accompany me as you arranged."

"Clementine, do not make it hard for me to do my duty. I have promised to help Richardson because I feel it is my duty to do so. I must go, and—I will."

Clementine looked at Felix in astonishment. It was the first time she had ever seen him exhibit any firmness, and this display surprised her. Hitherto he had yielded to her slightest requests, and they were many. She was strong-willed, and very unwilling to deny herself any pleasure.

"If you do not come with me now, Felix," she said, in a determined tone, "I shall be greatly offended."

"I have already spoken, Clementine, and now I am going to carry out my promise to Richardson."

Without another word, Fitz-Jones bowed and left the room, and in a few minutes was seated on a 'bus slowly rolling towards Parson Dick's slum. Although usually too indolent and indifferent to exert himself, Fitz-Jones was not a weak man. He would acquiesce rather than arouse himself, but when he had once decided on a course of action he could be both determined and energetic. Such he showed himself at this time, believing that Clementine, on reflection, would approve of his action. In this, however, he was deceived, as he found on his return home in the evening a very cold note, saying that she was leaving town for a few days, and so she could not interfere with his duties.

It must be confessed that Clementine was not altogether his own choice. The match had been arranged by Canon Paulminster and Lady Brightfield. Fitz-Jones had acquiesced, as it secured him an income, and Clementine was passing fair as society women go. His mother's sister, Lady Brightfield, had hinted that his willingness to follow her advice would be of pecuniary benefit to him when she should pay the last debt of nature and leave him the balance. His mother, Lady Fitz-Jones, was possessed of but a very slender income, and his elder brother, who inherited both title and rent-roll, was only just able to meet the ordinary expenses of an officer in a cavalry regiment.

Canon Paulminster had married a very wealthy woman, and, being a widower, it was rumoured that he was prepared to repeat the act. He had three daughters, of whom Clementine was the youngest. Her sisters had married well—at least, society criticism pronounced that verdict—and Fitz-Jones

was congratulated on the wisdom of his choice. His mother was an amiable woman, but very weak, and her sister ruled her at mid-life as she had done from earliest years. Lady Brightfield approved of the match, and so Lady Fitz-Jones also expressed her approval, and the matter was settled.

While in a country curacy, Fitz-Jones had made the acquaintance of a girl possessed of many excellent qualities, but as poor as himself; and, being the daughter of a country doctor, and grand-daughter of a draper, he knew he could never introduce her to the circle in which he had moved. His aunt may have suspected something of an attachment, and her movements were so rapid that Fitz-Jones found himself engaged to Clementine before he fully realised what he had done. At times he would recall the happy hours he had spent with Ethel Ford, and the rebukes which had fallen from her lips when he had shown himself too flippant, or indifferent to his duties.

After the service on the following Sunday morning, Fitz-Jones called on Parson Dick, who was still confined to his bed.

"*Es Felix, sis beatus,*" said Parson Dick, as the former entered his room.

"You are looking much better," replied Fitz-Jones.

"Thank you, I am better," said Parson Dick. "The hæmorrhage has ceased, and I shall soon be strong again. I am much obliged to you for your kind assistance."

"There is no obligation, old fellow. I am only now beginning to make an attempt to do my duty. Dr. Tippetts told me this morning that you are going for a holiday shortly with Standish."

"I had intended to do so, but, unfortunately, a

dear old friend, who had kindly volunteered to take my place during my absence, is now seriously ill, and I fear it will be impossible for him ever to take duty again."

"Then, Richardson, or Parson Dick, as everyone calls you, if I can in any way discharge your duties while you are absent, I will do so with pleasure. I will not venture to offer to take your place, as I feel that I am quite incapable of doing so."

Parson Dick looked keenly at Fitz-Jones. He had noticed a wonderful change in him in the short time he had known him. Fitz-Jones' manner had become very subdued and quiet, in place of his former gay and flippant way.

"I accept your offer, Fitz-Jones, with much pleasure," said Parson Dick. "It will be an introduction to some of your new parishioners. If you can accommodate yourself to circumstances, you will find dinner, or rather lunch, in my study ready for you. Dr. Tippet and Standish have both left invitations for you to dine with them, so you can make your choice, if no pre-engagement prevents your accepting their hospitality."

"Thank you," replied Fitz-Jones. "I will accept your offer of lunch, which, I suppose, would constitute your dinner?"

"I dine at mid-day. I have so many kind friends, that I shall need the appetite of a giant to eat all the good things which have been sent for me."

"Well, Richardson, as Dr. Tippet said you were to talk as little as possible, I will lunch at once, so that I may have a few minutes to prepare some discourse. For the first time in my life, I attempted to preach this morning from notes only."

"And you succeeded?"

"Better than I could have hoped."

Fitz-Jones descended to Parson Dick's study, where he found two ladies waiting. They were Miss Standish and Violet.

"Mr. Fitz-Jones," said Miss Standish, "I am Lionel Standish's aunt, and my young companion is Miss Violet Tippet. So much for introduction."

Fitz-Jones bowed and smiled.

"How is Parson Dick," inquired Miss Standish.

"He is decidedly better, thank you," replied Fitz-Jones, and as he spoke he watched the effect of his words on Violet's pale, careworn face.

She brightened in an instant. Fitz-Jones had been much in the society of women, and drew his own conclusions.

"I have brought some suitable food for Parson Dick," said Miss Standish, "and I have given Mrs. Hurst instructions how to serve it up. So you, Mr. Fitz-Jones, are to be our vicar?"

Miss Standish glanced at him over her glasses.

"Canon Paulminster has offered me the living."

"And you have accepted it?"

"Yes."

"You are rather young to be vicar of a large parish."

"But that defect time will soon rectify, Miss Standish."

"Yes, you will get old soon enough."

"But, I suppose, you would like to add that you doubt if I shall be wise enough?"

"I never even hinted such a thought," replied Miss Standish, smiling. "We will not keep you from your lunch. I believe Lionel has invited you to dine with him?"

"Yes, thank you."

"We shall hope to see you again this afternoon at the Sunday school."

Fitz-Jones lunched, and then made a few notes for his evening discourse, after which he assisted in the school. Violet was to have sung two solos at night, but being too unwell even to attend the service, Rose did her best as substitute.

"Now, Mr. Fitz-Jones," exclaimed Dr. Tippet at the conclusion of the service, "Dr. Standish is here, and both Miss Standish and he have agreed to dine with me to-night, so I shall take no refusal from you."

"Then, Dr. Tippet, I will not refuse," replied Fitz-Jones. "Here is Standish. Well, Standish, how is Richardson now?"

"He is wonderfully better," replied Lionel. "I have been sitting with him an hour, and he protests that he is well enough to resume his duties."

"Not for a few more days," replied Dr. Tippet. "I must prohibit his attempting any work for a week."

"For a week? For a month, Dr. Tippet," said Miss Standish, who had overheard the doctor's remark.

"I shall be pleased to take charge of the district for a month," remarked Fitz-Jones.

"And a very good apprenticeship for you, too," added Miss Standish, in her usual outspoken way.

Dr. Tippet and Lionel accompanied Fitz-Jones, while Miss Standish, with Rose and Edward, came a few paces after them.

"I have never heard you sing better than you did this evening, Rose," observed Miss Standish.

"Praise from you, Miss Standish, is praise indeed," said Edward, smiling.

"I never flatter," replied Miss Standish. "I am a plain-spoken woman, and at times I am afraid I am considered rude. What I think, I say; and if I do offend others, I know that there must be some truth in my remarks. How did you leave Violet?"

"She was better, thank you," replied Rose. "We have a friend staying with us for a few days, an old schoolfellow of Vi's, and she volunteered to look after her during our absence. Vi would not let me remain with her. She said if I did not take her place at church she should come herself."

"Humph!" ejaculated Miss Standish. "I suppose there is a cause for Violet's breakdown. Poor girl! I am sorry for her. Parson Dick is not long for this world."

"Do you think he cannot live long?" inquired Rose, earnestly.

"Yes, child, I am afraid it is not possible," replied Miss Standish, and her voice quivered as she spoke. "I have long guessed poor Violet's secret."

"Why is it that good men are taken away so soon, while useless ones like myself live on?" remarked Edward.

"I don't believe, Mr. Armstrong, that you are a useless man," replied Miss Standish. "We are all called hence when we have either finished our life's work, be it what it may, or when, after the opportunity has been given, we have omitted to do our duty. Good people seem to get their life's work done sooner than others."

"If Parson Dick dies, it will break Violet's heart," said Rose, with faltering voice.

"Unless I am mistaken, Rose," said Miss Standish, "Parson Dick would not have remained a single man

had he not been conscious of his own state of health. He told Lionel the other day that if a man knew that he inherited consumption, or any disease which would pass on to another generation, it was his duty to remain single."

"If Parson Dick went abroad to a warmer climate, might he not get strong?" inquired Rose.

"Your father says it is too late, Rose," replied Miss Standish, calmly, but with suppressed emotion. "Parson Dick cannot live many months; it may be only weeks."

"Oh, please don't tell Violet," cried Rose.

"I am not likely to, Rose, my child, and mind you do not distress her by betraying the truth at present," replied Miss Standish.

"Does Dick know how ill he is?" asked Edward.

"Dr. Tippet says he thinks he does," replied Miss Standish, "but while there's life there's hope. He seems much better to-day, and Lionel is going to drive him out as soon as he has sufficiently recovered. If Parson Dick is not strong enough for a walking tour, they are going for a driving tour, and I rather think that Dr. Tippet will go with them. He said he should enjoy it."

"I hope pa will go with them," exclaimed Rose. "It would do him good, and we should feel that if he were with Parson Dick he would look after him, should he be taken ill on the road."

"There is no doubt that such a thought has occurred to your father," said Miss Standish. "He is a good-hearted man, and can do a kindness in such a quiet, unobtrusive way that the recipients may even fancy he is serving his own ends only. Lionel understood his motive at once. Now, we must try to be as cheerful as we can."

Miss Standish made the last remark as they drew near the little doctor's home. Lionel, with Fitz-Jones, followed Dr. Tippet into the house, and a few seconds later the others also entered.

Violet met her father in the hall, and learned all that she could of Parson Dick's condition, which cheered her a little, even if it did not altogether satisfy her.

"Where is Ethel, Vi?" inquired Rose.

"In our room," replied Violet. "Will you introduce her to Dr. Standish and Mr. Fitz-Jones?"

"Yes, when Edward brings them in from the garden. Dr. Standish wanted Mr. Fitz-Jones to see those plants he gave you. He says yours look better than his own, although his gardener considers himself perfect in his art."

"There is no credit due to me, Rose, as Dr. Standish planted them himself, and has been every week to see how they thrive. All that I have done has been to keep them well watered."

"Mr. Fitz-Jones wishes to hear you sing when you are well enough. He has heard you so highly praised. He can play the organ very well, and thoroughly enjoyed our sacred concert."

"Did Miss Paulminster come in the evening?"

"No. He said she was out of town for a few days. I must go now, Vi, or Ethel will think me rude."

"I will come presently, Rose."

Rose led her friend into the dining-room almost at the same time as Edward entered with Lionel and Fitz-Jones.

"Mr. Fitz-Jones," she said, "allow me to introduce you to my friend, Miss Ethel Ford."

Fitz-Jones started.

CHAPTER XV

SCIENCE AND RELIGION

IN a few days Parson Dick had so far recovered that he was able to drive out. Lionel came for him in his victoria with a pair of horses that soon put green fields before their view in place of dirty houses. It was a fine day, and the heat was tempered by a gentle breeze.

"Dr. Tippetts says you must have a change of air at once, Dick," began Lionel, "and as I know you would not quit your neighbourhood while Mortimer is lingering, we have arranged that you shall for the present live with me. I can drive you to your district every day for an hour or two. Fitz-Jones has wonderfully changed. He seems to take almost as much pleasure in your work as you do yourself. It is excellent training for him, too, as, when he is at the parish church with the well-to-do people, he will not be able to forget that there are the poor also. A month in your district will be valuable experience."

"I am, indeed, Lionel, much obliged to you for your kindness, and I will accept your invitation, as I feel it may save me taking a longer holiday. Miss Standish rules us all, I believe, and I must say in most matters her judgment is sound. I do not think I err when I attribute this plan to her action?"

"You might have made a worse guess."

"It is a delightful change here in the open country. I have often wondered when I have been walking in Epping Forest why the Londoners invariably choose Chingford plain or some other open spot. I suppose it must be because they can so rarely get an unblemished view of the sun."

"Very likely."

"The sun often strikes me as one of the clearest proofs of a trinity in unity. As a scientist, you must know better than I do the constitution of the sun; but this much is clear to me, that it is the source of three things—of heat, of light, of chemical action. This seems to me the best argument from analogy of the Trinity of the Godhead. As the Father, God of Love, may be considered as the world's heat, so may Christ be viewed as the Light of the World, and the mysterious working of the Holy Spirit is no less wonderful than that of chemical action. Unseen in their action, these last are proved by their effects. As chemical action is for ever going on in the body, so is spiritual action in the soul. In a healthy body, chemical action invigorates life, but in a diseased frame it hastens decay; so in a healthy soul the Holy Spirit invigorates, but in a diseased nature it only makes spiritual death more manifest by its absence."

They had reached the top of a hill, from which the prospect was far reaching and pleasing. At Parson Dick's suggestion, they quitted the carriage, and strolled through a field and sat on a fence.

"It is now seven years, Lionel, since you began your search after truth. What is your conclusion?"

"I have not yet reached the conclusion. I have learned some truths, and I believe there are others

beyond my comprehension. The proof of the existence of God cannot be demonstrated in the laboratory, nor can the immortality of the soul be found in a test tube. I fear that what I have so far ascertained are negative results. I will freely confess that the influence of religion on some men's lives has been such as to make me admire them, and wonder from whence such power springs. I am at times disposed to think that religion may be the result of an instinct, or of a special faculty, which is wanting in some people."

"It springs from faith."

"What is faith? How can one get faith?"

"That is just what I cannot answer. Faith is implanted in us by the Spirit of God."

"Dick, I am not prejudiced against religion. I will confess that I would be religious if I felt the influence, but I do not, and if I pretended to such I should be false. Whatever I may lack, I hope I shall never be a hypocrite, and pretend to have feelings which I do not possess. If I felt the impulse of religious fervour, I would devote my life as readily to work like yours as I do now to scientific pursuits. I do not believe that a man can be converted merely by argument, no matter how cogent the logic and how powerful the eloquence. I have never heard or read any arguments which could convince me so that I could honestly adopt some definite creed. The only thing that has so far had any weight with me has been the influence which I have seen of a Christian creed on the lives of some. That I cannot doubt. What some men and women have willingly endured for the sake of the Founder of their religion is beyond admiration. The power of the name of Christ

astonishes me as much as it did Napoleon when in exile."

"You would admit, I assume, that true religion has some influence for good on the lives of people."

"Undoubtedly."

"Do you think it is possible for men and women to restrain their passions equally well, whether they accept the gospel teaching or not?"

"I did."

"Do you now?"

"I am not quite so sure about it. I did believe that an appeal to the intellect might have the desired effect. In some cases I still think it would, but I fear that the bulk of mankind does not think and reflect sufficiently, and they need restraint in some form or other."

"And the gospel restrains, you think?"

"I am quite ready to admit that it does restrain those who are real believers."

"As you are not ignorant of the evidences of Christianity, to what extent are you willing to recognise them?"

"I think there can be no reasonable doubt that Christ was teaching in Palestine about the time assigned to Him. I also think that the three synoptic gospels were written by the accepted authors, and that the four great Pauline epistles are genuine. The evidence that Jesus lived on this earth is infinitely greater than that Cæsar ever trod the streets of Rome, but then, in the latter case, nothing of great import turns on it."

"Most of the Higher Critics, I think, will allow that much, but with the morality of the gospel teaching are you satisfied?"

"If I criticised it, I am afraid I might say it seems beyond human power to follow."

"Quite true, it is so; hence the necessity of the influence of the Holy Spirit."

"What is the Holy Spirit? How can a man know if he possesses it? Since I have been an avowed agnostic, I have not felt the pricks of conscience less than before, nor have I felt less desire to help my fellow-creatures. I know that some would say I had been baptized, and at the moment of being sprinkled I was there and then made what I was not before, a child of God, and they would probably add that I had not yet entirely quenched the Holy Spirit. Since I have thought, I have never been able to believe in baptismal regeneration. I have met with men whose lives will bear investigation, and who have been devout in their religion, and yet have never been baptized. Have not these men been under the influence of the Holy Spirit, or is there such a thing as natural good, which men can exhibit without needing to profess or believe in any religion?"

"There can be but one source of good—that is, God, and all who do good actions are under the influence of His Holy Spirit, however that may have entered into their lives. You ask what is the Holy Spirit. It is that influence in us which prompts us to do good to others and to ourselves. Intellectual error does not destroy its influence, but a vicious and debased life does, whatever creed a wilful sinner may profess. I know that there are many, very many, who never think enough to feel doubts. Lionel, your heart is Christ's although your brain is not."

Lionel looked eagerly at Parson Dick.

"Do you really mean that, Dick?"

"I do. I wish it was in my power to solve your doubts, but it is very difficult to view questions exactly in the same light as others. I think, Lionel, that much of your doubt arises from your desire, not so much to know God, as to understand Him. That is impossible. What you would probably recognise as a first cause, I call God."

"I have learnt that there is much which cannot be ascertained."

"And therefore revealed."

"I know it is very difficult to exchange thoughts, even when men are anxious to do so. As soon as we endeavour to represent thoughts by words, we are liable to misunderstand each other."

"That is true; none the less, we will try. Does religion ask you to take for granted more than science does? Can science furnish a reason for every effect?"

"Not at present. Science is progressive, and what we do not know to-day we may know to-morrow."

"Religion, too, is progressive in thoughtful minds, and we are quite willing to let science expose to us the wonderful ways in which God works. Science is moving in a line almost parallel to religion, but not quite. It is gradually converging, and I firmly believe that the day is not far distant, when we know more of science, that we shall see its complete reconciliation with religion. At present, many men seem to know enough of science to doubt, but not enough to satisfy their questionings. If in science you can be content to hold fast such truths as you can grasp, and leave judgment suspended on those of which you have not yet learnt enough, in common justice you should treat religion in the same way. There are many, very many, questions I can ask myself concerning the ways

of Almighty God which I cannot answer, but that does not make me refuse those truths which I have already grasped. To understand God it would be necessary to have a mind equal to His, and in the nature of things that is impossible. You cannot prove that truth is true. It is an axiom."

"I am quite willing to admit that."

"As a Church of England parson, you will pardon my saying that I think our Church has done quite right in laying broad but well-defined lines within which we can argue. Beyond these it is only speculation, and as such worthless, nay, even injurious. Let us judge of Christianity by its effects, and I know you will be satisfied that its influence has been of enormous benefit to mankind. We often lose the real cause in the effect. Many attribute to the progress of civilisation the benefits we enjoy, such as education, hospitals, and charitable institutions. I do not hesitate to say but for the influence of the teaching of Christ none of these would be now flourishing. I do not believe that universal education would be established if we were not moved by the Holy Spirit to a love of our brethren. Even those who not only do not acknowledge a definite belief in Christ, but even deny Him, yes, even those are influenced now by the effect of gospel teaching, which has permeated all mankind. Men often act under God's guidance without being conscious of the power which directs them. I do not mean to say that all men are mere puppets in the hands of the Almighty, to be moved as mechanical toys without option on their part. We all have free-will, but that is a greater force as a resisting power than as the means of accomplishing anything. The greatest and most awful power has been placed in

man's possession—that of resisting the Divine will. Yes, it is in man's power to resist God and quench His Holy Spirit. In science, nothing can be accomplished without obeying what are called laws of nature. Let a man defy these laws, he will never learn her secrets. Let him obey them, and he can call down lightning from the clouds with impunity. So in the spiritual world: if a man wishes to know God, he must commence by obeying His laws as taught by Christ. If any man or woman will begin by trying to live up to the gospel precepts, he or she will never doubt the existence of the Creator nor the divinity of Christ. Action dissipates doubt. Let any sceptic watch at the bedsides of dying Christians, and he will exclaim, as Thomas did, 'My Lord and my God.'"

Lionel had listened attentively while Parson Dick was speaking, and watched the changing expression on his face.

"I can readily agree with you as to man's free-will," he said. "That is one fact which I have never doubted. With regard to conscience, do you believe, as a Christian, that it is something distinct from the Holy Spirit, and that the ancient philosophers, Socrates or Plato, for example, felt the power of conscience?"

"Certainly. Conscience is nothing fresh. Christianity did not introduce into man any faculty he did not possess before. Its influence has been to ennoble those faculties by the action of the Holy Spirit. It is as if the stunted tree of the frigid zone were transplanted into the tropics. The tree would still be of the same nature, but under improved conditions it would be a forest giant with luxurious foliage. Before

Christ, man was dwarfed in his moral nature, and now it is within his power to be a giant, if he will permit the Spirit of Jesus to influence his life. As I said just now, man may, if he wills, resist the Spirit until at last he has effectually quenched it. Let any man despise the warnings of his conscience and wilfully persist in an evil course, and the time will come when the still voice will speak no more, and then the salvation of such a one is to be despaired of. Remorse he may feel; repentance he cannot. Heaven is that state where a man is in affinity with his Master. Where God's will is man's will, and no polluting thought ever stains the sanctified soul. When a man has persistently defied his Creator and debased his life by unrepented sin, he is in no state to enter Heaven, where the one will reigns supreme. I do not say such a man will not be in Heaven. I say he cannot be, unless his character is changed."

They entered a small churchyard and wandered amongst the tombs.

"A parson should be to his congregation what a telescope is to the astronomer," observed Lionel, after a pause; "that by which Heaven is made clearer."

"Exactly so," replied Parson Dick, "and as the astronomer should direct his thoughts to the heavens, and not to the telescope, so the congregation should turn to God, and not worship or think too much of the human agent who directs them."

"Parson Dick, look at these tombstones," exclaimed Lionel. "See on how many of them it is put, 'Died in Jesus.' Who can answer this question, 'How did they live?'"

Parson Dick was prevented from answering this by a fit of coughing, which left him pale and exhausted.

"You had better return to the carriage," said Lionel, kindly.

"Not for a few minutes, Lionel. I am enjoying this fresh air and lovely evening. I have been much freer from coughing to-day, and I am sure I cannot do better than be in the open air. What a glorious sunset! I never see it in my room, but it always sets me thinking of the rapid flight of time, and of the hour when I shall see my last sunset, until I awaken where it never sets. What a terrible thing, Lionel, it must be to grow old without a belief in the immortality of the soul! To feel oneself getting feebler and feebler, and nearer and nearer the grave which shall end all. Did I not from the depth of my heart believe in the resurrection of the dead, life would be unbearable and death awful. To cease to be! That is a fearful thought for anyone. We all instinctively cling to life so long as we feel the slightest doubt of the world to come. Old age, with all its misery, and often accompanied by infirmities, is borne with patience rather than face death, which to such people means the end of everything. If there is one fact more than any other to which I cling and for which I thank God, it is this—the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Everything turns on this. If the dead be raised, then every other miracle is possible. No man can form any adequate conception of God, but, thanks be to Him, we can realise what Jesus was; and if He be risen from the dead, so shall we be raised also."

"If!" exclaimed Lionel, bitterly.

"Thanks to God, we have proof of it, as far as any fact is capable of being proved. Not only did the risen Lord appear to His chosen disciples, but even the sceptical Thomas was vouchsafed evidence which satisfied him and removed all his doubts."

"Parson Dick," said Lionel, "what would I not give to have your faith and your hope!"

"Lionel, believe me, in God's time you will. Spend a few weeks in my parish with me, and see what is the effect of God's love and mercy on repentant sinners, and you will no longer feel any doubts."

"Dick, when I really believed in the resurrection of the dead, I felt as if life were never ending, and now I can feel the years gliding by rapidly with a blank, a dark, never-ending blank, at the end."

"Matter is indestructible. Is it less credible that a soul can be indestructible?"

Lionel did not reply. They re-entered the carriage and drove homewards.

"I will alight here," Lionel observed at the corner of a street, "as I promised to call and see how Mortimer is. I will drive you down to-morrow morning to visit him."

Lionel proceeded on foot, while Parson Dick drove on.

"Mr. Mortimer will be glad to see you, Dr. Standish," said the landlady. "He is very much worse, and my boy has gone to Dr. Tippet. I am afraid he is dying. I sent for Parson Dick, but they said he was driving out with you."

"I will send a hansom to fetch Parson Dick," replied Lionel, writing a few words on his card and hailing a passing cab.

"I am pleased to see you once again, Standish," said Mortimer as Lionel entered. "For your kindness I can only thank you, as it will not be in my power to repay you. I shall not, however, put you to much further expense, as Dr. Tippet says my days

are numbered. Days! A few hours are all that now remain to me."

Lionel, as he looked at the wasted form, could see the truth of what he said. The change in the poor fellow in twenty-four hours was very marked.

"You know well, Standish, what my life has been," he continued, in broken sentences. "While I had health and wealth, I despised God and His commands, and now I am going to die. I do not now think that believing in nothing can give a man much cause for joy at the idea of ceasing to exist—to pass into dust like a dog. I used to boast that I was an atheist, and afterwards I qualified the expression and said I was a freethinker, and finally an agnostic. The change in word did not imply any change in my life or in my creed. I pursued pleasure until I had drained the cup to the dregs, and then I paused when my money was gone. When I first fell ill, I cursed God. Yes, I cursed my Maker! Standish, I have never been so deep in sin but that at times the still small voice would speak. Again I plunged deeper into sin, but I could not stifle the witness of truth. Here I am now on the brink of the grave, a wreck both in body and in soul. I am beginning to realise what it means when the Scripture says, 'Made perfect through suffering.' Had I not suffered, I had never turned to Jesus. I have jeered at my fellow-students when they spoke to me of such things as conversion and holiness. I said I believed in nothing. I lied! No man can believe in nothing. He may say that he does, but he can't. My last prayer will be, 'God bless Parson Dick.' None but those who have sinned deeply, and have become conscious of their sinfulness, can realise the joy of being forgiven. Forgiven!

The fearful page in the book of life has been blotted out for me—for *me*! I have often boasted that I would die like a philosopher—like Hume. Pride! I have none now. The death-bed is not the place for theatrical display. At times I think of my days of childhood, and prayers I have not uttered for years have come back to me. Standish, I believe that from being a Higher Critic you have become an agnostic. I know also that you have not made your unbelief an excuse for a vicious life. As a dying man, with my last breath I implore you to turn to Jesus. Believe me that it is a real comfort at death's door to know that He is there to open the portal at the feeblest knock. I ask you, Standish, what consolation can philosophy and science offer me *now*? Nothing. Let me implore you to spend some time with Parson Dick, and with him visit the suffering poor, and you will see the proof of what the love of God passing through one man to another can effect."

Mortimer ceased speaking, and his form quivered a little. A ghastly pallor passed over his face, and his eyes seemed to grow brighter. Parson Dick entered. The dying man smiled at him, and tried to speak.

"Lionel," said Parson Dick, "he is passing hence. Let us pray."

While Lionel was seated alone in his study late that night, to read some papers by Dr. Rayson on his great hypothesis, his thoughts constantly wandered from the subject to the death of Mortimer. Although in the course of his studies Lionel had often dissected bodies, he had never before been with anyone at the moment of death, and it had made a deep impression

on him. Whether Christianity was well founded or only a delusion, he could not fail to perceive the effect of the belief in Christ on Mortimer. If his former fellow-student were now but a mass of decomposing matter about to undergo great chemical changes, the hope of life in the world to come had at least made his last moments happy. From the depths of his heart Lionel uttered Pilate's exclamation, "What is truth?" He had known many men, fellow-students and others, who had willingly given up all the pleasures of life to become missionaries in places where almost certain death awaited them. He knew that a certain motive or power called faith had influenced them, as it had the earliest followers of Jesus. Faith! Oh, what would he not have given to possess it! He admitted, and readily so, that the Sermon on the Mount was an ideal discourse on social morality, and that mankind would be the better and the happier if they strove to live up to the standard set in that homily. Miracles he did not credit, but he could well have been a Christian without the proof of miraculous power being established. He felt that the one great question which included all others was this: "Was Jesus the Son of God or an impostor?" Lionel could accept no *via media*. There were but these two contradictories, and the establishment of the one was the refutation of the other. At times his doubts on this caused him excruciating agony. That many professing to be Christians were insincere did not disturb him. Hypocrisy, he knew, was not confined to religion. Science too has its charlatans.

As Lionel was thus seated in deep thought in the silence of the night, the great question again presented itself to him. Either Jesus was the Son of

God, or else he was the greatest, the cruellest of all impostors. Did not Christianity and Christendom revolt against the second alternative? Could an impostor have lived the life that Jesus did? Could he have uttered the words as man had never before, nor has since, spoken? Could he have died as Jesus died, blessing his enemies? Could the sayings of an impostor have influenced millions of lives after nearly two thousand years?

Lionel buried his face in his hands, and the last words of Mortimer came back to him.

CHAPTER XVI

PARSON DICK AT LIONEL'S HOME

THE next morning Parson Dick was strolling round the grounds of Lionel's house, when Olive Kenyere encountered him. They had met a few times before.

"Good day, Mr. Richardson," she said.

He returned the greeting.

"I am so pleased to see that you are better. It is an awful thing to be ill."

"Awful! Why so?"

"Well, Mr. Richardson, I will say it is at least unpleasant to be confined to one's bed, especially if there is a prospect of death."

"Is there not a prospect of death in full health as well as during an illness?"

"But one does not think of it when one is well."

"It would be better, Miss Kenyere, if people in health did think of death sometimes."

"But the thought of death is fearfully depressing."

"It should not be. To view the matter in a philosophical light, as surely as we live we shall die, and even scientists will not dispute the fact of the mortality of the body."

"I know I shall die, but thinking about it will not alter the fact."

"Certainly not, but meditation on it with a view to the regulation of one's life will destroy the sting of death."

"I wish I could live for ever."

"So you will—after death."

"I used to believe that once upon a time."

"And you do not now?"

"No, certainly not. Since I have studied science I have dismissed the fables of childhood."

"And in place of them turned to other fables?"

"I believe in nothing which is not capable of proof."

"What constitutes proof with you, Miss Kenyere? Must every statement be reduced to a cogent syllogism?"

"A proof must bear either the test of observation or of a legitimate mental process according to the laws of thought."

"Nothing short of that would satisfy you?"

"Nothing."

"The resurrection of the dead and the immortality of the soul fail to satisfy you under these two heads."

"Yes; certainly."

"And so you do not believe either the one or the other?"

"No."

"You do not believe that any truths are intuitive?"

"Do you mean that first truths are self-evident?"

"Yes, Miss Kenyere."

"I have heard it stated. Of course there are axioms."

"But axioms do not fall under the two heads you have named."

"No, axioms are axioms. Don't you think those orchids are lovely?" she added abruptly, to change the subject.

"I do. All flowers are lovely whether they are in the hedgerow or in the hothouse."

"I am still as fond of botany as I was in childhood," continued Olive, anxious to prevent Parson Dick from returning to the conversation about death.

"It is one of the most interesting sciences which tell us of the wondrous power of the Creator. I think we feel the loving care of God when we examine the perfect construction of a flower more than when we gaze into the vastness of the heavens and lose ourselves in contemplating the immensity of space and time. We can watch the plant or the tree awaking from its winter sleep and clothing itself with spring's new garb. Then we can see the bud, the leaf, the blossom, and finally the decay."

"Yes," hastily replied Olive, fearing that Parson Dick might moralize. "Do you happen to know if Lionel is in?"

"No, he left about an hour ago to call on Dr. Rayson."

"He is a wonderful man. I should like to have the reputation as a scientist that he has. He is a giant in mind."

"It seems to me, Miss Kenyere, that people are sometimes apt to forget that the scientists who discover great truths are the discoverers only, and not the creators of those truths."

"Have you read any of Dr. Rayson's works, Mr. Richardson?"

"Yes, I have."

"Then, you do sometimes read something besides your Bible and Prayer-Book?"

There was a slight touch of sarcasm in these words.

"Yes, Miss Kenyere, I read something of current literature. I have often found the daily paper an excellent commentary on the warnings contained in the Bible."

"You are not afraid to read sceptical works."

"Afraid? My faith would not be shaken by those. I do not read sceptical works and atheistic attacks on Christianity merely for the sake of refuting the arguments. Christianity has stood nearly twenty centuries of criticism, and it is stronger to-day than it has ever been."

"Why do you read Dr. Rayson's works?"

"Because he is a man of much learning and deep thought. I do not challenge his knowledge, but his judgment only. I have learned much by reading his works. He has made clear to me the unity of purpose and the law of unalterable order in God's universe."

"You have, of course, read also his attacks on the philosophy of Christianity."

"I have."

"What did you think of them?"

"It appears to me that Dr. Rayson criticises Christianity as if he were afraid of what he was saying, and his concluding remarks remind me of a boy throwing a stone and then running away."

"Don't you think that his statements may disturb many who call themselves Christians?"

"I am afraid that his influence on some minds would tend to disturb them. His remarks are destructive and never constructive. He never attempts to offer anything in the place of religious belief. I do not think any good can come of unsettling people's minds unless you can give something definite in exchange."

"Surely it is better to have no creed than to have a false one?"

"Everyone must believe in something. A healthy mind can have no vacuum. In the same way we always worship something."

"I do not worship now. I have not said a prayer for years."

"Pardon me, Miss Kenyere, but you do worship something. You worship intellect, and, as women invariably worship a person rather than an idea, you worship Dr. Rayson. Prayer is only a small portion of worship. The Greeks worshipped the Beautiful, the Romans Law; it was reserved for the Israelites to worship Holiness."

"What is the object of Christian worship?"

"*Ἀγάπη* as personified in Christ."

"I think Christianity is a failure."

"A failure, Miss Kenyere! How can it be said to have failed when it has never been fairly tried? The number of true Christians is, and always has been, small. If only one of the Gospel precepts was put into universal practice, we should realise to some extent what Heaven was before this world was ended."

"Which one?"

"That everyone should do to others what he wished them to do to himself. Now we do unto others as they do unto us, and this precept is not a Gospel one. If we only acted on the Gospel teaching there would be no more wars and no law courts."

"Why are so many passages in the New Testament so difficult to understand even by learned theologians?"

"It may be that God, in His wisdom, knowing that the human mind was progressive, and that man

must study and think, has left many truths to be revealed only in the process of time. In religion, as in science, truth is only revealed to the earnest student."

"Your preaching, Mr. Richardson, has at all events had a great effect on some of your congregation. My aunt, who is not easily persuaded, is always willing to listen to you, and eh—others are still more influenced."

Parson Dick made no reply.

"Some women," continued Olive, "are naturally more disposed to be religious than others, especially if they are emotional——"

"Rather than intellectual?"

"Yes, that is what I was about to say. Violet Tippet is very religious, is she not? I think she would like to spend all day in your church."

Olive glanced at Parson Dick to see the effect of her words, and when she saw the pained expression on his pale face, she regretted that she had uttered them. Parson Dick walked on slowly in silence, and, as Miss Standish appeared at that moment, Olive was unable to accomplish the object of her interview with him, which was to ascertain by indirect remarks what his feelings were with regard to Violet. This was rather a difficult task for a young woman, but Olive never lacked confidence in herself.

"Parson Dick," said Miss Standish, "Dr. Tippet said you were to have food every three hours, so you must come in and eat what is prepared for you. Good morning, Olive."

Parson Dick was as obedient as a child, and entered the house, followed at a distance by Miss Standish and Olive.

"Lionel has gone to Dr. Rayson's, Mr. Richardson says?" remarked Olive.

"Yes, he has," replied her aunt, "did you wish to see him?"

"I hoped to have been here in time to go with him, as he has promised to introduce me to Dr. Rayson."

"Indeed."

"Yes, aunt, I have an intense desire to know the greatest scientist of the day."

"So that you may talk about it afterwards, I suppose. I do not know when Lionel will be in, but we shall lunch at the usual hour if you care to stay."

"Thank you, aunt. I will wait, as there are several things I wish to ask Lionel on scientific subjects."

"So I suppose. While you are waiting, perhaps you would like to borrow a needle and cotton and mend your gloves, unless you are too scientific to regard tidiness?"

Olive blushed with anger and shame, but speedily recovered her usual calm.

"I am not fond of sewing."

"So it appears," was her aunt's laconic reply.

They entered the house in silence. Olive went into Lionel's study, while her aunt repaired to the dining-room to see that Parson Dick was taking the food ordered by Dr. Tippet.

"I am afraid I have not much appetite to-day, Miss Standish," he observed apologetically. "I have done my best not to incur your displeasure."

"Your best, Parson Dick, must be up to my standard or I shall be cross," she replied, as she glanced at the small quantity of food he had taken.

"You must not forget how much I ate at breakfast."

"Enough to satisfy a sparrow. I shall be back in

a few minutes, and I hope by that time to find that you have eaten all that I have prepared for you."

Miss Standish quitted the room, and a few minutes later Philip entered.

"Beg your pardon, sir," he said, "but I thought you'd be comfortabler in the summer-house if I rolled an arm-chair into it, so I've put the easiest chair we've got. You ought to be in the fresh air every minute you can, sir."

"Thank you, Philip. Since you have been so kind as to put a chair there, directly I have finished my first lunch I will go—that is if Miss Standish will allow me," he added with a smile.

"Miss Standish said you were not to be indoors more than you could help, sir. Miss Kenyere is here again. She don't give Master Lionel no peace."

"She seems fond of studying science."

"She don't care no more for science than me. She wants everybody to think how clever she is, and she wants also to be Mrs. Lionel Standish. I hope she won't be. If she is, Master Lionel will have to find another butler. Miss Standish doesn't like her; at least she don't want her to be Master Lionel's wife."

"What does Lionel say on the matter, Philip?"

"He don't say nothing, sir, but his eyes is cast in another direction. I can't think, when a man's comfortable and happy, what he wants to get married for?"

"Perhaps Dr. Standish is not happy?"

"Then he ought to be, sir. I don't believe he's so happy as he used to be before he got so deep into science. I'm not a religious man, but I believe in religion, and I know Master Lionel hasn't been so happy and contented since he gave up going to

church. I know going to church ain't everything, sir, and a man may not be much better for it, but staying away from church certainly can't do any man any good. Most of the men I know, who don't go to church, spend their time in drinking and smoking. One of them said to me he could think out a sermon for himself. Perhaps he could, but I don't believe that you can get much of a sermon out of a sporting paper."

"I am afraid not, Philip, unless it be a warning not to bet."

"Miss Olive Kenyere wasn't a bad sort of a gal when she was young, before she became a freethinker or whatever she calls herself. I've noticed lately particularly how restless she is. She can't seem to keep her mind fixed on nothing. She seems just as if she'd lost something and couldn't find it."

"She has lost something, Philip—her faith. A woman without religion is like a ship without a rudder."

"That's about the mark, sir. She's only wasting her time in hunting after Master Lionel. There's one gal—I mean young lady—that Miss Standish has got her eye on for Master Lionel. I don't advise him to get married, sir; but, if he does, this young lady is the best he can find."

"If she is approved of by you, Philip," said Parson Dick, smiling, "she must be perfection."

"She's the best suited for him I've yet seen."

"Who might this young lady be, Philip?"

"You know her, sir. It's Miss Violet Tippet."

Parson Dick's face brightened.

"I am glad to hear you say so, Philip," he exclaimed. "She is an excellent girl, and I hope I may

live to see them united. It is my greatest wish that they should know each other. I believe that her influence on him would lead him from doubt to faith. I will, if the opportunity occurs, talk to Miss Standish about the matter."

"Of course, sir, you won't say a word of what I've said."

"Certainly not, Philip."

Philip shuffled off, and by dint of persistent efforts Parson Dick finished the meal Miss Standish had provided, and betook himself to the summer-house situated in the most pleasant part of the grounds. There he sat and mused on what Philip had said.

"I don't leave you long alone, Parson Dick," observed Miss Standish, as she entered the arbour. "I came to see that you were seated in the shade and not in a draught."

"Thanks to Philip, I am extremely comfortable," replied Parson Dick, rising and offering his chair.

"No, sit down; I am only going to bother you for a few minutes, as I must look after my household affairs. What a restless creature Olive is. She has gone for a walk until lunch. I surmise she has gone in the direction of Dr. Rayson's. This afternoon I shall entrust you to Lionel's care, as I am going to call on some of your parishioners with Violet."

"Miss Standish, I know you will pardon my talking freely to you. I have so many kind friends who speak hopefully of my recovery to health, but I know that is not probable. Dr. Tippet must be aware that I am rapidly approaching my end, and you, too, cannot be ignorant of the fact. I feel within myself that I have not long to live, and there are a few things I should like to do before I am called away."

Parson Dick paused, and the eyes of the stout-hearted, but sympathetic, woman grew moist.

"It is my last and fondest wish that Lionel and Violet should be united. He is a Christian in everything but name, and, under the influence of Violet, he would be a professing one. She possesses all the qualities which would not only make a man happy, but, what is of far more importance, would make him good also."

"Parson Dick, I have always wished that Lionel might marry such a girl as Violet is, but I am afraid that may not be possible."

"Do you think that Lionel might prefer a woman of scientific attainments?"

"No, emphatically no. I know sufficient of Lionel's disposition to say that, if he marries, it will be a womanly woman. I believe Violet would be his choice."

"Then you think a marriage might be arranged?"

"Of that I am not sure—at least at present."

"Has Violet any attachment that you know of?"

"I will think over what you have said, Parson Dick," replied Miss Standish, avoiding his last question.

Parson Dick noticed this, and glanced at her.

"Miss Standish," he said anxiously, "you have avoided my question. If you can, I entreat you to answer it."

"I do not think any good can come if I tell you what I have suspected, and by chance overheard."

"You wish to save me pain?"

"Yes, Parson Dick."

"I hope, Miss Standish, that I have not been to blame. I have rigorously guarded myself from

exhibiting any feeling. I will candidly confess, had I not been conscious of my latent disease, I might—nay, I should—have sought Violet for my wife. I have done right, have I not, to remain single? I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. Had I been married, how great the wrench would have been! If I never have the chance of speaking to Violet on the subject, tell her, Miss Standish, my last wish was that she should marry Lionel. He will make her a good husband, and I know her influence will bring him to a knowledge of his Redeemer. I know you will not fail to fulfil my last request.”

“Parson Dick, I will not. You have acted your part well—so well, that Lionel has only recently guessed your secret. I am a keen observer, but I could never be certain of your attachment to Violet. If I were a man, she is the girl I should choose. But, Parson Dick, must I really no longer hope that you will get well again?”

Miss Standish's voice was full of emotion as she spoke.

“Miss Standish, I feel that my restoration to health is beyond hope. I do not believe that I shall live many weeks, it may only be days. I have at times felt an earnest desire to live longer that I might be of service to my poor parishioners. Although there is much, as you know, to make one despair at times, I have met with few, very few, who have not some bright spot in their character, even in their degraded state. Often I have seen the smouldering embers burst forth into a flame which has shed a halo of light in the dark hour of their death. God will find someone to continue my work.”

"He will, Parson Dick. Lionel is simply astonished at the change in Mr. Fitz-Jones. A good life cannot fail to influence others, and who knows but that your influence will affect Mr. Fitz-Jones so that he will continue your work."

"God grant that it may be so."

Footsteps were heard on the path, and Lionel appeared.

"Lionel, what is the matter? You do not look well."

"Do I not?"

"No, Lionel. What is the matter?"

Olive approached.

"I must have missed you, Lionel," she said, "unless you have not come by the main road?"

"I did not," replied Lionel. "Since, aunt, you wish to know what is the matter, I will tell you. While I was working with Sir Isaac Rayson—for he received notice of knighthood only last night—he complained of feeling unwell. He lay down on his couch for a few moments, and I sent for his medical adviser. His mind wandered, and his features became distorted. He has had a stroke of paralysis, and his mind is quite deranged. I waited some time with the doctor, who gives no hope of his recovery. At one stroke the giant in intellect has become an idiot!"

"How fearful!" exclaimed Olive. "Just in his hour of triumph too!"

"It is the hand of God," said Miss Standish.

CHAPTER XVII

MR. SMITHKINS AND THE BISHOP

"TOMLYNE, I want a word with you."

It was Mr. Smithkins who spoke to his fellow-churchwarden after an evening service.

"As many as you please," replied Mr. Tomlyne.

"Come and 'ave a bit of supper with me, and we'll 'ave a chat after."

"Very good."

Mr. Smithkins, although he was a very wealthy man, adhered to his early habits in all things. His dinner hour was still one o'clock.

Later in the evening they were seated in what might have constituted Mr. Smithkins' study, had he studied literature—but he did not. He called it his "snuggery," and it well merited the name. It was a small room which opened on to a large lawn, and was furnished in a homely but very comfortable style.

"Now, we'll smoke our churchwardens," he observed, as he took out two new long clay pipes and filled them with tobacco. One of them he handed to his colleague, and the other he lighted and commenced to smoke.

"A lovely evening," remarked Mr. Tomlyne, as

he smoked, and occasionally sipped a glass of colourless liquor.

"Not bad," assented Mr. Smithkins, absently.

"Your fruit trees look promising."

"Not bad," again assented Mr. Smithkins. "Tomlyne, I've got a plan, and I can't rest until I get it carried out."

With the keen instinct of a builder, Mr. Tomlyne grew interested. He could scent from afar the odour of bricks and mortar, and could see with his mind's eye a large cheque awaiting him.

"Mr. Rogerson wasn't a bad sort of a man," continued Mr. Smithkins, "but he's never once said a word to me about my being a sinner. He's never once said to me, 'Tom Smithkins, you're a bloomin' 'umbug. You take money from your pot-houses on Sundays, while you're singing your 'ymns 'ere, and then you give me a cheque to ease your conscience!' Tomlyne, our vicar has never talked to me like that."

"No, he has not, Mr. Smithkins; but, you see, he knew that the public-houses are the property of a company, and not of yourself only."

"That's what I've often said to myself. But it won't do, Tomlyne. You may 'umbug others, but you can't 'umbug yourself. Now, Parson Dick, though he ain't got a 'apenny to help himself, ain't above speaking out. Many men would have been offended at what he's said to me. They'd think it was nasty; but if Parson Dick has any unpleasant thing to say, he never says it in a nasty way. There he is a killin' himself, and 'ere am I keeping open that pub opposite his church. I says to myself to-day, 'Tom Smithkins, don't play the 'ypocrite any longer. If you want to help Parson Dick, shut up that pub.' I'm going to

buy the pub and all the premises of our company. It'll cost some eight thousand pounds, Tomlyne, but I'd willingly give eighty thousand to see Parson Dick well again! I'm going to pull down that pub, and we'll build a pretty church, a big schoolroom, a working-men's club, and a coffee 'ouse. Dr. Standish ain't no religious man, but he told me on the quiet, when I was a talking about Parson Dick, he'd give ten thousand pounds towards a church and school. That's a good round sum. I'll make my figger up to the same, and we shall get another ten thousand from somewhere or other."

"Mr. Smithkins, I will undertake to do the work without any profit. You shall pay only the cost of materials and the men's time."

"Tomlyne, you're a brick."

"And your the mortar, eh?" replied Mr. Tomlyne, laughing.

"I've been talking to young Fitz-Jones. He ain't a bad sort when you know him. He says he's quite willin' for Parson Dick to have his district made into a separate parish. Now, Tomlyne, let's me and you call on the bishop and ask him to give us a 'and in the job. We'll show him our plans, and maybe he'll tell us how to set to work to get the district made into a parish."

"Very good, Mr. Smithkins. I will have the plans ready for Wednesday. I know the area of the public-house and yards, as we took all the measurements when we rebuilt it for you. The plans of the church and school are now lying in my office."

"Then on Wednesday afternoon we will go to the bishop's."

"Have you heard how Parson Dick is to-day?"

"Yes. I saw Miss Standish with Miss Violet Tippet, and she said he wasn't much better. That poor gal was too ill to sing a solo. I think she's cut up about Parson Dick—and so is everybody else. Tomlyne, when you meet a real good man, not a 'ypocrite, not one who's always preachin' at you, as if he thought himself so much better, but one who don't say much, but lives up to what he preaches; who gives himself entirely to his work; who lives with his people—I say when you meet a real good man like that, you feel as if you wanted to be like him. Them self-righteous men only make you 'ate religion. One of the preaching women comes up to me one Sunday night, and shakes her fist in my face, and says I was going to hell, and I don't know what else. Instead of making me the better for her remarks, she only riled me. I says to her, 'Are you going to 'eaven?' 'Yes,' she says, 'rayther—I'm saved.' 'And I'm going in the opposite direction?' I asked. 'Yes,' she replied. 'Well,' I says, 'I don't care where I'm going, so long as it is not in the same direction as you.' That just about shut her up."

Mr. Tomlyne smiled, and then made several suggestions about the buildings. Late at night they parted, to meet again on the Wednesday for their visit to the bishop.

"Tom Smithkins," said the brewer to himself, when he was alone, "you've now made your first step in the right direction. Go on."

On the following Wednesday the two churchwardens were before the door of the bishop's palace.

"Is the bishop in?" inquired Mr. Smithkins.

"Is his lordship at leisure?" asked Mr. Tomlyne.

"Yes, sir," replied the footman. "His lordship

has received your letter, and requested me to show you into the library."

"It's 'ot," observed Mr. Smithkins.

"Yes, sir," replied the man, "it is very warm. His lordship is sitting in the garden. I will tell him that you have arrived. Will you be seated?"

"Tomlyne," said Mr. Smithkins, when the footman had gone, "this is a different reception from what we got at Paulminster's. Like master like man. If that's true, the bishop isn't a bad sort. His footman is wondrous civil."

"Gentlemen," exclaimed the bishop, with a genial smile on his handsome face as he entered the room, "I am pleased to see you. Pray be seated."

He shook hands with both. Mr. Smithkins eyed the bishop from head to toe.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but are you our bishop?"

"Yes, I am," replied the bishop.

"If you are a bishop," continued Mr. Smithkins, hesitatingly, "where are——"

"What?" asked his lordship.

"Well, bishop, I was going to ask where are your gaiters?"

"You see, Mr. Smithkins," replied the bishop, laughing, "the weather is very fine, and I do not need them."

The bishop was attired in the ordinary clerical garb.

Mr. Tomlyne was on tenter-hooks, fearing lest his outspoken colleague might give offence.

"We do not wish to detain your lordship too long," began Mr. Tomlyne.

"Tomlyne," exclaimed Mr. Smithkins, "let me

“ speak. Bishop, it’s just this. We’ve got a big parish, and so we’ve built in a slum a small mission church, which Parson Dick manages.”

“ The Reverend Richard Richardson,” added Mr Tomlyne, by way of explanation.

“ Nobody says the Reverend Richard Richardson,” continued Mr. Smithkins. “ We all call him Parson Dick. If ever there was a good man in this world, bishop, he’s one. Our vicar has retired, and Canon Paulminster has put his son-in-law in his stead to manage the place——”

“ Canon Paulminster,” explained Mr. Tomlyne, “ has offered the living to the Hon. and Rev. Felix Fitz-Jones, who is engaged to the canon’s daughter.”

“ Well, and Fitz-Jones has accepted it, too. He says he’s quite willing that Parson Dick should have his district made into a separate parish, and we’ve got the money to build a church, a Sunday school, a club-room, and a coffee shop. We’ve got the site, and we’ve brought the plans to show you, bishop.”

“ If your lordship can spare the time to see them,” added Mr. Tomlyne.

“ Certainly,” replied the bishop. “ I should be sadly wanting in a sense of duty if I could not spare the time to attend to the work which is being carried on in my diocese.”

“ There, bishop, on this ’ere map we marked off what might be made into a parish for Parson Dick. It won’t interfere with the parish church, as there will be a lot more building going on in the neighbourhood before long. This place is now my pub, but it won’t be so many weeks longer. Here are the plans of the church and the rest of the buildings. What’s most important of all, bishop, we’ve got the money. Parson

Dick wouldn't like to have a place that was in debt. It shall be all finished and paid for before he enters the church. We don't want him to know a word about it until it's all settled. I do 'ope, when he sees what's been done, he'll get well again."

"Is Parson Dick ill?" inquired his lordship.

"That he is," replied Mr. Smithkins.

"We are afraid, your lordship, that he is in consumption," added Mr. Tomlyne.

"I hope not," said the bishop, "as he must be an excellent man to command so much sympathy. I feel considerable interest in him, as I was his tutor in Hebrew when he was at college. As I have only been appointed to this diocese a few months, I have not yet had time to know all my clergy personally, which I intend to do. I have already visited many parishes, and it is my intention to visit that part of the metropolis which falls under my care very shortly. Your letter has fixed the date, as I hope to go round the district which you desire to be allotted to Parson Dick with you next week. Shall we say this day week?"

"Certainly, bishop. That's what I call kind and prompt."

"We are deeply indebted to your lordship," added Mr. Tomlyne, "for the trouble you have taken."

"Trouble!" echoed the bishop, "it is no trouble. It is a source of great pleasure to meet men like yourselves, who are so anxious to assist in the work of the Church."

"I 'ope I haven't offended you, bishop," said Mr. Smithkins, apologetically. "I suppose I ought to say your lordship, but I can't somehow mouth those words. I'm only a common man, bish—I mean, my lord."

"Mr. Smithkins," replied the bishop, "you are by

no means a common man. A man who is willing to make the sacrifice of wealth that you have is, as far as my experience goes, a very *uncommon* man."

"How did you know, bishop, that I had made any sacrifice?"

"You accidentally, when discussing the plans of the church, used the expression of 'my pub,'" replied his lordship, smiling, "hence my inference. Gentlemen, I cannot offer you any stimulants, as I am a follower of Father Mathew."

Mr. Smithkins looked inquiringly at his colleague, who smiled feebly, as if he wished the bishop to believe he understood the meaning of the words.

"A water-drinker," exclaimed the bishop, smiling, "or, to put it in quite plain language, a total abstainer."

"And so is Parson Dick," said Mr. Smithkins.

"Now, gentlemen, I am about to partake of a cup of tea in my summer-house. Will you join me?" asked his lordship.

"That's what I call nice of you," replied Mr. Smithkins. "We will with pleasure. Bishop, you're a stunner, and if all the big pots in the Church——"

"Church dignitaries," explained Mr. Tomlyne.

"Well, that's the same thing," continued Mr. Smithkins. "If all the Church dignities was like you, bishop, everyone in England would go to church."

The bishop chatted on various topics of the day while they drank tea.

"There will, of course, be some legal formalities connected with the alteration of the parish," his lordship observed, "but I do not anticipate experiencing any great difficulty in making the desired change, especially so as Mr. Fitz-Jones, the recently appointed vicar, is in favour of them. I shall endeavour to see

him before next Wednesday, so that we can define the limits of the district."

"It may be that Mr. Fitz-Jones and you wouldn't be above lunching at my place," said Mr. Smithkins. "I will drive you afterwards round the boundaries of the district."

"Speaking for myself, Mr. Smithkins, I shall be pleased to accept your invitation."

When they left the bishop, Mr. Smithkins was loud in praise of his lordship's geniality.

"I wish Paulminster would learn from the bishop how to treat men," he remarked; "but there, some parsons are only parsons, others are men also."

At the station, the brewer's carriage was waiting.

"Tomlyne," he said, "we will drive round and see if Dr. Tippet is at home. He will be pleased and no mistake."

They found the little doctor at home and alone.

"Dr. Tippet," said Mr. Smithkins, "we've got some good news for you."

"What is it?" inquired the doctor.

"We've seen the bishop, and he's turned up trumps."

The brewer gave a graphic description of their interview with the bishop. Mr. Tomlyne interposed a few observations by way of explanation.

"Now, doctor," exclaimed Mr. Smithkins, his face glowing with pleasure and excitement, "won't Parson Dick be pleased? It'll do him more good than medicine."

"Would that it might," replied Dr. Tippet, sadly.

"Is he very bad?"

"Mr. Smithkins, I am sorry to say that Parson Dick's hours are numbered. I fear he will never again be able to resume his duties."

"Dr. Tippet, don't say that Parson Dick's goin' to die! No, I won't hear it. He'll get better when he's had a change of air. That will do him good. I'll put my name to a cheque for any amount. Say, will a sea voyage pull him round again?"

"He cannot be moved at present."

"Is he confined to his bed, doctor?" asked Mr. Tomlyne.

Mr. Smithkins could not speak, but great beads of perspiration stood on his forehead as he anxiously waited the doctor's answer.

"I am sorry to say he is."

"Shall I never see him again?" inquired Mr. Smithkins.

"He must, for the present, be kept absolutely quiet," replied the doctor, "but while there is life there is hope."

"Then, Dr. Tippet, I will 'ope," said Mr. Smithkins.

"Parson Dick inquired very kindly after you both," continued Dr. Tippet. "He is wonderfully cheerful."

"A man like him ain't got no cause to be afraid of death," said Mr. Smithkins. "It's only men like me, who've been too much bent on making their pile, that's got good reason to fear dying."

"At least, Mr. Smithkins," observed Dr. Tippet, "I can say, and so could Parson Dick, that you have distributed your money with a liberal hand."

"But that don't make up for the way you've got it," remarked Mr. Smithkins; "no, that it don't."

"I will drive on to your house, Mr. Smithkins, after I have seen Parson Dick to-morrow morning, and let you know how he is."

"That's right, doctor," replied the brewer, "and I shall wait at 'ome until you've been."

Comforting himself with this reflection, the brewer drove off with his fellow-churchwarden, and was gratified on the morrow to hear that Parson Dick had rallied considerably.

CHAPTER XVIII

FELIX FITZ-JONES AND HIS ENGAGEMENT

THE bishop came on the day he had appointed, and was perfectly satisfied that the district was large enough to be made into a district parish. Fitz-Jones accompanied his lordship in his journey round, and they would afterwards have called on Parson Dick, but Dr. Tippet and Lionel had already taken him to the seaside, as he had rallied to such an extent that most people, except the doctor, were hopeful of his recovery.

Fitz-Jones had only received one very cold letter from Clementine in reply to three that he had sent her, and on the evening after the bishop had gone, he received a surprise visit from his aunt, Lady Brightfield.

"Felix," she exclaimed, "I have come all the way from Scotland to see what is the cause of this unpleasantness between Clementine and you."

"Has she not told you, aunt?"

"She said that you did not pay her that attention which you had done before."

"Did she tell you that at last I have come to a

sense of what my duty is, and I am endeavouring to fulfil it?"

"She said that you had some morbid ideas of self-abnegation. Of course, you cannot expect Clementine to live in such a neighbourhood as this?"

"Of course not."

"How long do you intend to continue here, Felix?"

"Until Richardson is able to resume his duties."

"Clementine told me that you said in one of your letters that he was consumptive. Perhaps he will not recover."

"Then, aunt, I shall endeavour to carry out the duties myself."

"Quite a martyr! Come, Felix, your duties will be at the parish church, to which you have been appointed, and I suppose in a few Sundays you will be inducted. Shall I tell Clementine that you have come to your senses, and we will find a suitable house for you, as the rectory is the private property of Mr. Rogerson?"

"If I can judge from Clementine's letter, she must be too happy where she is to wish to settle down to parish work. She has written more of a Major Fetherstone than she has of me, or to me."

"Indeed! Let me see her letter."

Fitz-Jones handed it to his aunt, who read it without comment.

"Have you seen Clementine lately?" he asked.

"No, Felix."

"She has written but this once to me, and that is what she says. I know that Major Fetherstone was a constant visitor at the canon's before our engagement, and Clementine often mentioned his name.

Aunt, to speak plainly, I believe she would be glad to break off our engagement."

"Impossible, Felix! What would society say?"

"If it spoke the truth, aunt, which it never does, it would say that it was best for both parties."

"Felix!"

"I mean what I say, aunt."

"Would you be pleased to be released from the engagement?"

"I will speak the truth, aunt; I should. We were both rushed into an engagement before we realised what we had done. Although I say it, we were not so much to blame in the matter as those who are too fond of matchmaking to consult the interested parties."

"Felix, this to my face!"

Lady Brightfield looked indignant and angry.

"I have written to Clementine and asked her point-blank if she wished to be released from the engagement."

"Surely you have not posted it?"

"I have, aunt."

"What will Canon Paulminster say? He gave you this living on the condition of your marrying Clementine."

"He never said so, and when informed that I am not likely to succeed to my brother's title, as he telegraphed to me this morning announcing the birth of a son, the canon may prefer a major, who is heir to an earldom, to a parson working in a poor neighbourhood."

"Do you consider it honourable on your part to retain the living, if you do not marry Clementine?"

"I intend to retain the living until this district is

made into a separate parish. After that has been done, if Clementine prefers to marry the major, she is free to do so, and I shall resign the benefice. Canon Paulminster has a niece ; perhaps the living will buy her a husband ? ”

“ Felix, don’t be sarcastic.”

“ Canon Paulminster was buying my brother’s possible title with it. Do you suppose if I had been a poor working curate, of what is called low social standing, he would have presented me with this living ? ”

His aunt did not reply to this question.

“ Felix,” she said, after a pause, “ if you carry out your Quixotic idea of settling down in this wretched slum, you will lose all your friends.”

“ Friends ! Acquaintances, aunt. If those who have welcomed me into their circle won’t come to see me here, they may stay away. I feel a wonderful change has come over me, and I now realise what is true atheism. People may talk of the scepticism of scientists, but scientific men at least do worship Nature ; they may talk of the infidelity and vice of the outcasts from society and of the poor in the slums, but they do help each other ; but if they wish to find atheism in its real meaning—that is of people living without God—let them study society. Yes, aunt, since I have lived here I have learnt that atheism is the true name of the creed of society, however much it may be covered by the cloak of religion.”

“ Felix, you are mad ! ”

“ I am only speaking the real truth, aunt, and you know it. What is the God that society worships ? Holiness and purity ? Self-sacrifice and temperance ? No ; a thousand times no. Those whom I know, in

what is called the upper class, are the slaves of fashion and the most abject devotees to what society dictates. While I was under its thralldom I did not see the slavery, but I do now. You dare not yourself, aunt, do anything without thinking—what would society say? I ask you—Have you ever thought, or desired to know, what would God say?"

"Felix, I will not be taken to task by you. I shall consider it my duty to see Clementine and break off this match. I now acknowledge that I was to blame in the matter, but you used to be a sensible man?"

"Then to devote one's life to the service of God and his fellow-creatures is the mark of a madman? Parson Dick, as the people call Richardson, must be hopelessly mad if that is the standard by which mind is to be judged. Would to God that there were more madmen like him!"

"I hope Canon Paulminster will see that I am not to blame in this matter. I shall ask him to send for you; perhaps he will be able to cure you of your Quixotic ideas."

"I doubt it very much."

"I should not like anything to occur which might estrange us."

"Estrange!" echoed Fitz-Jones.

"Yes, Felix, estrange us. I came not only to talk to you about Clementine, but also about myself. Have you heard the latest news?"

"You forget that I am now quite outside the circle of fashion."

"You may not be surprised if I tell you, Felix—"

"That you are about to marry Canon Paulminster?"

"An excellent guess! Such is the fact of the matter. We had hoped to arrange a double wedding?"

"Possibly you may find Major Fetherstone willing to oblige you."

"Since you are so foolish to your own interests I shall look elsewhere for a partner. Supposing Clementine desires to be freed from her engagement to you, which in your present frame of mind I should not be surprised at, Canon Paulminster will be sure to desire to see you. He is in town now for a few days. Be very guarded in what you say to him, so as not to give offence. There is a vacant bishopric—"

"And Canon Paulminster may be appointed to it?"

"It is not altogether improbable."

When Lady Brightfield left Fitz-Jones' residence he accompanied her to her carriage, which she had left in a respectable thoroughfare, not wishing even her coachman to know in what a shabby house her nephew lived.

Two days later three letters reached Fitz-Jones—one from his aunt, a second from Clementine, the third from Canon Paulminster. He read Clementine's first. She readily agreed with him that it would be best for them to sever their engagement. His aunt's communication quite accorded with Clementine's views. The canon wrote only a few words, requesting him to call on him that day; and, as Fitz-Jones desired to settle the affair as soon as possible, he decided to obey the canon's request.

Whatever may have been the defects in Fitz-Jones' character, want of courage was not one, and he was not the slightest dismayed when he found himself face to face with Canon Paulminster.

"I am glad, Felix," he said, "that you have come. An interview is in every way preferable to letters. Clementine tells me that you desire to be freed from your engagement."

"Did she not say also, sir, that such was her wish?"

"She says you have completely changed of late."

"I have."

"And that it is very evident that, now you have obtained a good living, you desire to be freed from all encumbrance."

"Sir!" exclaimed Fitz-Jones indignantly, stung by the sarcastic tone of the canon.

"I mean what I say," replied the canon, icily.

"Then, am I to consider that, when you offered me the living it was a business transaction by which I was bribed to marry your daughter? Are you aware that my chance of succession to my brother's title is very remote?"

"Do you forget whom you are addressing, Mr. Fitz-Jones?"

"No, sir, I do not—the father of Clementine. Had I been a poor curate of low degree, would Canon Paulminster have honoured me by giving me his daughter?"

The canon's face grew red with anger.

"I will say this, sir," continued Fitz-Jones, "both for Clementine and myself, that we did not make the engagement. That was arranged by Lady Brightfield and yourself."

"And by them it will be severed; in fact, I may say it has been broken. Clementine has shown her good sense by acting on our advice, and is quite agreeable that the engagement should be ended at once."

"So she wrote. Perhaps Major Fetherstone will be more to her mind, as he used to be."

"That, Mr. Fitz-Jones, is our affair. I must say the change in you has been very sudden. It is very rarely that one meets among men of breeding and education a case of sudden conversion—at least, a *genuine* case."

The canon laid great emphasis on the word "genuine."

"Canon Paulminster," replied Fitz-Jones, very quietly, "I will not deny that I have undergone a great change. I do not call it conversion, as by that word I understand a complete change. I have only reached a turning point, and will not quibble about words as to what such a change should be called. I have been aroused to a sense of my duties—suddenly aroused. I have been frivolous and indifferent before, never realising the great responsibility of my vocation. The sight of Richardson giving up his life to his work and for his work—as I fear his days on this earth are numbered—has had a wonderful effect on me. The contrast between that earnest and devout man's life and mine struck me. His words, his influence, but, most of all, his actions have shown me what a parson should be and can be. I never spent such a night of agony as I did after I had assisted him in a service. My slumbering conscience was loudly awakened, and I became another man. I reviewed my past life, and prayed to God, as I have never prayed before, for His help to be zealous in His work. I have at the close of a service often repeated the words, 'The peace of God,' but never till now have I known what that meant."

"Peace!" exclaimed the canon, with a slight curl

of contempt on his lips ; " and is that why you have quarrelled with my daughter ? "

" I have not quarrelled with her," replied Fitz-Jones, quietly. " That would be my last thought or wish. I wrote to her three times, and in reply received but one cold, short letter."

" Indeed. Now, to return to the question of the living. Of course you will resign at once ? "

" No, sir, I shall not."

" Do you mean to say that you intend to retain it, Mr. Fitz-Jones ? "

" For the present, sir."

" Do you consider it honourable to do so ? "

" I shall not touch the money, sir. I intend to retain the living until Richardson's district is made into a separate parish, after which I will restore your living to you."

" May I ask you what you intend to do ? "

" If Richardson should recover, which I earnestly pray, I hope to be his colleague ; if he dies, I shall endeavour to carry out the duties which he has so faithfully fulfilled."

" And that is your fixed intention ? "

" It is, sir."

" Then, Mr. Fitz-Jones, I have nothing further to say on the matter. Has Lady Brightfield said anything—ahem—else to you ? "

" Yes, sir. She spoke of her approaching marriage with you."

" Yes, yes."

Fitz-Jones could not honestly offer the canon his congratulations, so he refrained from all comment. When he quitted Canon Paulminster, he did not return straight to his residence, but by train and

walking sought Lionel's house, although he knew that he was still away at the seaside with Parson Dick and Dr. Tippet.

"Is Miss Standish in?" Fitz-Jones asked Philip on his arrival.

"Yes, sir."

"If she is not engaged, perhaps she can spare me a few minutes?"

"I will see, sir."

Fitz-Jones had visited Lionel several times, so Philip had no need to ask his name.

"Pray, come in, Mr. Fitz-Jones," said Miss Standish, coming herself to greet him. "I can spare as much time as you desire."

Fitz-Jones followed her into her room and took a seat.

"Some trouble in the parish?" she asked.

"No, Miss Standish," he replied, with a smile; "this time it is out of the parish. I come to seek your advice, and, if possible, your assistance also."

"Tell me how I can help you. I have spoken my mind so freely to you at times that I was afraid—no, I won't say afraid—but I thought I must have offended you."

"You certainly have given me some hard knocks at times, Miss Standish, but I deserved them, and, as you see, I am not offended. I must at least acknowledge that you speak the truth fearlessly. In society where I have been accustomed to move, truth is seldom spoken except by accident, lest offence should be given. To me it is quite refreshing to be removed from over-civilisation and the shackles of society opinion."

"I am not going to flatter you, Mr. Fitz-Jones, but

I must candidly confess that I have been—others also—astonished at the manly way in which you have set to work. It is no disparagement to you when I say it is a difficult task for any man to follow Parson Dick.”

“It is, Miss Standish. You know I was engaged to Miss Paulminster? Hence my appointment to this parish.”

“You were! Are you not now?”

“No, Miss Standish. By mutual consent we have agreed to sever it. The alliance was arranged for us rather than by us, and we have on both sides since seen the mistake.”

“Will that necessitate your renouncing your preferment?”

“Legally, no; morally, yes. The bishop is quite in favour of the division of the present parish into two, of which Richardson’s district will form one. When this has been done, I shall resign my living. I would do so at once, but I wish Parson Dick to have a free hand.”

“I am sorry to tell you, Mr. Fitz-Jones, that my nephew writes to say that Parson Dick is again much worse, and unless a change takes place in the next few days for the better, Dr. Tippet advises his return.”

“Miss Standish, I sincerely hope he may be spared, if only to see his parish completed and his church and buildings ready. Should he not recover, although I feel under what disadvantages I should labour, it is my desire to continue his work.”

“Mr. Fitz-Jones, I am delighted to hear you say so. We shall all do our best to aid you in your undertaking.”

“You are very kind, Miss Standish. Now, I wish

to talk about myself again, and it was for this purpose that I came—entirely a selfish journey. When I was a curate in the country, I became acquainted with a young lady whom I found to be such as even you would approve of. I never made any proposals to her, but there was that tacit understanding which both felt amounted almost to an engagement. I knew that the circle in which I moved—particularly my lady relatives—would not receive her, as her grandfather was a tradesman. I have acted in a very shabby manner towards her. I will not attempt to excuse myself by saying that I was influenced by others; I was quite old enough to know better. I was flattered by an alliance with the daughter of a Church dignitary and the prospect of a good income with future preferment, and I gradually dropped the acquaintance of this girl—not without some qualms of conscience. Now I am again free, I wish to make some reparation to her. I have tried to write to her an explanation, but I can't pen the letter. I should prefer to speak to her, but I have not had the opportunity. All I wish her now to know is that I am thoroughly ashamed of the shabby way I have acted towards her, and that I desire her forgiveness. More I dare not ask now, and even that I do not deserve. Miss Standish, will you, if I am not asking too much, convey to her what I say. Don't spare me, as I don't deserve it."

"Who is the young lady?"

"A friend of the Misses Tippet. Her name is Ethel Ford."

"Ethel Ford! I have, of course, met her several times lately, and, by a strange coincidence, the three girls are coming to take tea with me presently, and to stay to dinner also."

"It is nearly four," remarked Fitz-Jones, consulting his watch. "I had better be gone."

"Nonsense," replied Miss Standish, "wait and hear your fate like a man. I have every reason to believe that Ethel is still free. You have now acted like a man and a Christian, and, unless I misjudge Ethel, she will not fail to forgive you and—even more."

"Miss Standish, I will act on your advice. I will wait."

CHAPTER XIX

THREE GIRLS

WHILE Fitz-Jones was interviewing Canon Paulminster, Rose, Violet, and Ethel Ford were seated in the garden of the doctor's house, chatting. Rose had invited her old friend, Ethel, purposely to cheer up Violet, and in doing so she was unconsciously the means of her meeting Felix Fitz-Jones again. With a woman's insight Ethel had soon learned Violet's secret.

"Sis," said Violet, "I wonder why dad has not written to us. He promised us a letter every day, and we have not had one for two days. Parson Dick must be worse, or he would have written, I am sure."

"Father did not say he was worse in his last letter," replied Rose, evasively.

"No, sis; but he did not say he was better, and it is impossible for him to remain as he is. He must get better soon or worse. Tell me, Rose, has dad sent a letter, and you have kept it from me?"

Rose changed colour.

"Sis, I know you do all this out of kindness, but it is not kind all the same. I prefer to hear the truth, whatever it may be. Ethel, you must have seen the letter. Tell me what dad said."

"Vi," replied Rose, "I was going to show you the letter to-night. I did not wish to distress you, as we are going presently to Miss Standish. Dad says Parson Dick is not so well."

"Is he dead?" demanded Violet eagerly, and her face paled.

"No, Vi dear, he is not so well, that is all," replied Rose.

"Let me see the letter, sis," said Violet, more composedly.

"I will go and fetch it, Vi, darling," replied her sister, kissing her, and hastening out of the room.

"Vi," said Ethel, when they were alone, "I can sympathise with you, dear. I have loved and lost. Parson Dick is still alive, so your loss is not yet so great as mine."

"Were you engaged, Ethel?"

"Not in words, but it was almost the same thing."

"You mean, Ethel, that you were in love at least?"

"Yes, Vi, and I believe he was too—I know he was."

"When did he die?"

"He is not dead, Vi. It is worse to me than that. He is about to be married to someone else."

"I am so sorry for you, Ethel. I don't know why it is I love Parson Dick. I have tried not to do so, and I have also known that he would never marry at all. I will be braver. You will never let anyone know my secret, Ethel, will you?"

"You may trust me as I trust you, Vi."

"Here is the letter, Vi," said Rose as she entered at that moment; "I could not find it for a few minutes."

Violet read the letter eagerly.

"Sis," she said, calmly, "please don't again hide anything from me. I can bear all now. I know, and always have known, that Parson Dick will never get well again. I shall get over my sorrow in time—at least in some degree."

"I am afraid my wedding will be rather a sad affair," remarked Rose. "We should so much have liked Parson Dick to marry us, but I fear that cannot be—will not be."

The three girls remained silent for some minutes.

"When you are married, sis," said Violet, "I shall ask dad to let Ethel live with us here. She has two sisters at home, so they can spare her very well."

"I should very much like, Vi, to spend long holidays with you," observed Ethel. "I know it will be very dull for you when you are left alone. Dr. Tippet is very kind and jolly, but he is out so much."

"There, sis, don't let us all be sad now," exclaimed Rose; "I am not gone yet. Troubles and misery come quite soon enough, so let us wait until they do come. We must dress, or we shall be late, and you know Miss Standish is painfully punctual, and speaks very plainly to those who are not in time."

"I know she does," replied Violet, trying to be cheerful, "but when one knows her, one does not mind her remarks so much. She has a kind heart as well as a plain-spoken tongue."

They walked to Lionel's home, and arrived fully five minutes before the appointed time. Miss Standish welcomed them warmly.

"Now, girls, I am going to make use of you for a few minutes," she said. "Rose, will you and Violet kindly take a small parcel for me to Mrs. Marton. She has been ill, and I promised to send her something.

You need not stay many minutes. Tell her I shall be waiting tea for you. She is a good soul, but her talk is apt at times to become tedious, and you will have an excuse for putting a limit to it. You will be back in about twenty minutes. Ethel, I have something also for you to do here, so you can take your hat off."

The two sisters readily undertook to execute Miss Standish's commission, and, when they were gone, she led Ethel into her room, Fitz-Jones having been banished to Lionel's study.

"Ethel," she said abruptly, "I want to speak to you."

"What about, Miss Standish?" Ethel asked, perhaps with some dim foreboding of the subject, as she had seen Fitz-Jones several times of late.

"I will not beat about the bush, child," she replied, kindly. "The engagement between Mr. Fitz-Jones and Miss Paulminster has been broken by mutual consent, and with the acquiescence of friends on both sides. He has confessed to me the shabby way he has treated you, Ethel, and has requested me to entreat your forgiveness."

Ethel had turned pale while Miss Standish spoke, but by a violent effort she composed herself in some degree.

"If my forgiveness is all he asks, he shall have that," she replied with an effort. "In fact, I had already forgiven him if I had anything to pardon."

Miss Standish repeated what Fitz-Jones had said, and this gave Ethel an opportunity of regaining her equanimity. Her resentment of Fitz-Jones' treatment had never degenerated into spite; on the contrary, she suffered in silence, feeling that she ought never to have allowed herself to imagine that he

would enter into an engagement with one out of his own social circle. She could not help feeling pleased, more than that, proud—that he had proved himself a man. Forgive him! She had never even blamed him, but herself only.

"Ethel," said Miss Standish, when she had finished her repetition of Fitz-Jones' confession, "will you consent to meet him again?"

"I have already done so lately several times, Miss Standish."

"Yes, I know you have, because you could not very well have avoided doing so. Will you meet him of your own free will, child?"

Ethel looked at the kind-hearted woman, and murmured almost inaudibly "Yes." Miss Standish left the room, and Fitz-Jones entered almost immediately.

"Ethel!" he exclaimed.

"Felix!" she said.

Miss Standish waited to hear no more, but joined the two girls in the garden. Tea was set in the summer-house.

"You have been nearly half-an-hour, girls," she said when she waylaid Rose and Violet at the entrance gates. "Come into the summer-house."

"It was not our fault, really, Miss Standish," replied Violet. "We were standing at the door nearly ten minutes trying to break away. Where is Ethel?"

"She is *engaged*," replied Miss Standish, with marked emphasis on the last word. "But, there, I am not going to wait any longer for my cup of tea."

Rose had not noticed what Miss Standish had said, but Violet looked at her enquiringly.

"Have you heard that Mr. Fitz-Jones and Miss

Paulminster have by mutual consent severed their engagement?" she asked.

"No," replied both of the girls.

"Then I shall leave Ethel and him to explain," she replied, as she saw them coming across the lawn.

"Now, Miss Standish, I understand why you emphasised the word '*engaged*,'" said Violet, smiling one of her old sweet smiles. Poor girl! she had not smiled much of late.

Ethel blushed, and looked very happy.

"Before I sit down," said Fitz-Jones, "if you have not already explained, Miss Standish, I must and will."

"Then speak for yourself, and be brief," replied Miss Standish, as she poured out the tea.

He did so. After tea Rose remained with the happy pair, while Miss Standish and Violet went to tend some of Lionel's special plants.

"Violet," said the former, "I sometimes wish that Lionel's foreign plants had died before he went away with Parson Dick. No one is allowed to touch them now but me, and in warm weather I am not very partial to hothouses."

"I will come every day and look after them for you," replied Violet. "Perhaps Dr. Standish would entrust them to my care, as I look after those he gave me, and I think, without exaggeration, that they are in rather better condition than these."

"I leave them to you from this moment, Violet, so I hope you won't forget your promise. Come, child, I cannot stay in this furnace any longer. We will sit in my room for a few minutes, and cool ourselves before rejoining the others."

Violet followed her into the room.

"Come here, my child," said Miss Standish, in her

kindest tones, when she had seated herself. "You are small, so that cushion will be comfortable for you."

Violet seated herself on a cushion by the side of Miss Standish, who stroked the girl's dark hair. Violet looked up wistfully into the good lady's face.

"You have some bad news to tell me," she said, in faltering tones.

"Rose and Ethel are happy now, my little Vi," replied Miss Standish, as she caressed the girl, "and it seems hard that the path of sorrow and pain should be reserved for you, my dear. We must not and will not complain of God's dealing. When we know more, we shall understand that all things happen for good to those who strive to carry out His will."

"Please tell me, Miss Standish," pleaded Violet, with tear-bedewed eyes, "is Parson Dick much worse?"

"My poor child, he is. Lionel has written to say that he hopes to bring him here the day after tomorrow. He fears, if they wait only a few days longer, that they may be unable to move him."

"I feared as much," said Violet, calmly. "I am trying to bear it. You have guessed my secret, Miss Standish. I know you have. I have felt it some time, as you have been so kind to me. Pray, do not let Parson Dick know that I love him. I have tried not to love him too much. It would only pain him. He must never know how much I have suffered."

Violet could say no more. She buried her head on Miss Standish's lap and wept. The good-hearted woman's eyes were filled with tears. When Violet's grief had in some measure subsided, Miss Standish kissed her.

"My dear little girl," she said, with her arm round

Violet's neck, "Parson Dick knows of your attachment, and, what is more, he has confessed to me that although he has been able to restrain the expression of his feelings, he has not been unconscious of the sensations. He loves his little Violet, and, had he not been conscious in himself of the disease which carried off his father and his brothers, he would have claimed you, my child, as his bride. Lionel writes in his letter that Parson Dick desires to see you, and I have said this much to prepare you."

"Parson Dick loves me!" exclaimed Violet, as if she could hardly realise the words.

"Yes, Violet."

"I am so happy to hear it; oh, so happy."

The young girl turned very pale, and nearly fainted. A dose of sal volatile and Miss Standish's very pungent smelling salts restored her, and then she lay down quietly while Miss Standish rubbed her hands and fanned her face. Thus some minutes passed.

"I am better now," said Violet. "I am sorry to have given you so much trouble."

"And I am sorry to see you suffer so much, my child," replied Miss Standish; and as she spoke, her memory flew back thirty years, and she became a girl again, and recalled what she had suffered when she read of the death of her lover.

"I used to misjudge you so much, Miss Standish. I used to think you were always cross to me and disliked me, but, now I know you, I have learnt to love you very much."

Miss Standish kissed the girl, and, after a pause, said: "Violet, old maids are ridiculed and despised, but we, too, have our duties in the world. There is

much old maids can do that even married women are less suited for. Old maids have been young maids, and have had experiences in life which serve them well when they wish to help others. I, too, have known, my child, what it is to lose one whom I loved. I could never feel the same attachment to another. I have not lost the memory of the feelings of youth. It is as fresh in me as in you, little one. Time reconciles us to our life, be it what it may, but even time itself cannot always efface the wounds in the heart—they remain until that heart has ceased to pulse. Violet, it is worth a world of suffering to be able to sympathise with others, and if my experience can help to console you, I have not suffered in vain. I know you have more to suffer, but we, who believe in a life to come, cannot mourn like those who lack the consolation."

Violet looked into the face of her kind friend, and saw the tears in her eyes.

"I am quite well now," she said. "I will try and be brave for Parson Dick's sake. You won't mind my coming, when he returns, to see how he is, will you?"

"I will call for you, my child. Dr. Tippet will not, in all probability, let Parson Dick see you until the day after his return."

"Oh, no, of course not. But it is a little comfort to feel that he is in the same house. May I——"

"What, Violet?"

"May I call you auntie? You have been so kind to me that I shall always love you."

"I shall like you to do so very much. May it be a word of good omen also."

Violet was thinking too much about Parson Dick to notice the last words which Miss Standish had uttered.

"Shall we go and join the others—auntie?"

"There is no hurry, dear. Rose and Ethel know why you are with me. Poor girl, Rose could not break the news to you. It was left to the hard-hearted old maid to do that."

Miss Standish smiled as she said this.

"I am glad that Ethel and Rose are both happy now. I can never be happy again."

"Yes, Violet, you can be. I am quite happy and content with my lot. I never can forget what has happened; but when I recall the past, the sorrow, hallowed by time, is not a sadness which knows no relief. It is, if I may say so, a happy sorrow."

"I hear a ring. I wonder who it is?" asked Violet.

"I don't think you need wonder. Unless my ears deceive me, it is Mr. Armstrong. I told him on Sunday, if he could not find a better dinner for this evening, he might dine with us, and see you home afterwards."

"Yes, it is Edward's voice."

"Now, Violet, wipe your tears away, and we two maids, old and young, will be happy in the happiness of others. If we are to suffer, we will bear it like martyrs, and not inflict our troubles on others to no purpose. Come, my child, we will be as cheerful and as happy as we can, so that we may not mar the happiness of the rest."

CHAPTER XX

"ACROSS THE BAR"

"PARSON DICK, I must return to town to-day to see a very nervous old patient, and I hope to be back this evening in time to dine with Standish."

"Go, doctor, by all means. I should be very sorry to prevent your relieving those who are in danger and suffering."

"The patient I am going to see is certainly not in any danger. When people are very ill they are seldom nervous. Nervous people undoubtedly suffer much, but unfortunately they make others suffer more. They are the most difficult to cure, as the remedy lies in themselves. It needs a very persistent and powerful effort of the will, and that is just what they cannot, or will not, do—perhaps it is beyond their own powers. Neurosis is a complaint largely on the increase, owing to the high pressure of modern life. You would be surprised if you knew to what extent even those men whom you would think had nerves of iron are subject to it. I have been astonished myself."

"Over-civilisation is a very doubtful blessing, doctor. I often think how much happier they mu

have been in patriarchal times. It is unnatural to live crowded like we do, and what is contrary to nature is certain to pay the penalty."

"It is, Parson Dick."

"Dr. Tippet, you know my secret; and you know also that Lionel has written to Miss Standish to break the news to Violet. I ask you one last favour. When I am back at Lionel's, should it please God to permit me to return, will you let me see Violet once again? You know I shall not be here many days longer. You cannot even wish now to make me believe the contrary. Dr. Tippet, I am not asking too much, am I?"

Dr. Tippet coughed, he sniffed, he screwed up his face, but he could not trust his voice to reply. He clasped the emaciated hand of the patient sufferer, and hastily quitted the room. Lionel entered soon afterwards. Parson Dick was gazing out at the sea through the open window. The sun was shining brightly on the ebbing tide, while a gentle breeze fanned the trees.

"The sun will not cease to glow,
Nor will the wind cease to blow;
Tides will ebb and tides will flow
When I am gone."

Thus spoke Parson Dick. Lionel seated himself near him.

"Lionel, I feel bright to-day, as bright as yon sun, so I should like to have a long chat with you, as it may be our last. Don't tell me, old fellow, that I may be tired. What matter if I am? I am soon going to have a long, long rest. Lionel, I want to talk to you about Violet. You know what my feelings are, and

why I have given them no expression. You must feel that I have done right. She is still young, very young in experience of this world. It is my earnest wish that, in the near future, you should seek her for your wife. At present she respects you, and there can be no true affection where there is no respect. You have acknowledged to me that, of all the girls and women you have met, Violet is in your estimation the best. Your aunt loves her. I know that Violet will not forget me, nor will you, and I have begged Dr. Tippet to let me see her once more should I be spared to return to your home. She may not be easily won, Lionel, but she is worth the winning. I would not like her to pass the rest of her life in singleness because it is not the will of God that we should be spared to each other. The time may come, nay, will come, when science alone will not be able to satisfy all your affection and aims in life."

"Dick, the time *has* come!"

Parson Dick looked at his friend, and a smile beamed on his pale face.

"I am thankful, Lionel, to hear you say that. Whatever is entirely of this world and nothing of the next must satiate in time. It is a law of nature, it is a decree of God ; and, when a man is sated, he must turn to other things which are not alone of this world. When a man has subordinated his emotions to his will, to be controlled according to his judgment, I know in such a one that any sudden change would be a miracle. The change will be slow, but it will be certain. It will not be like yon tide, ebbing and flowing, but will flow on without ceasing. Your honesty and your integrity of purpose, Lionel, have always made me hopeful of your ultimate acknowledgment that

God is the Creator of all things, and Jesus Christ, His Son, is the Saviour of man."

"Dick, I feel I am gradually being drawn to acknowledge that there must be a God. If it were only to make your last moments happier I would utter the creed, but you would not, I know, wish me to say words which had no root in my heart. At present I could not with truth say the creed, but—I may later on."

"Lionel, sudden changes are seldom lasting, and it is the shallow pools that are agitated by every breath of wind. You have said enough to make me very happy, and I know that the God of Truth will bring all who honestly seek truth to a knowledge of Him. I believe that the influence of women over men is, on the whole, greater than the influence of men over women. So, should it be that Violet may wed you even before you have reached the haven of truth, I feel persuaded that her influence would aid in bringing you to a knowledge of God. Many Christians might learn this, at least, from you: to be charitable in their judgment on those who are not of their opinion. I have never heard you, as unfortunately too many sceptics do, attack either Christians or Christianity. I have often noticed, in such attacks, that in most writers there lurks beneath a certain amount of fear of what they are doing, lest there might be something more in religion than superstition and hypocrisy."

A fit of coughing interrupted Parson Dick, and for some minutes he was too exhausted to continue.

"Am I right, Lionel," he said when he had revived, "in saying that Dr. Rayson, or rather Sir Isaac Rayson, allowed his children to read the Bible and to attend service at church?"

"Yes, Dick. At first he refused both, but he found to be ignorant of Scripture was to be ignorant of a branch of learning and of the source of many expressions in our language. The number of questions they plied him with, to explain words they had heard and quotations oft cited, showed him the necessity of letting them learn, at least, Scripture history. I have myself been surprised to what extent the language and expressions of the Bible have influenced our language, and everyone, whether a believer or unbeliever, having any claim to education must read the Bible, even if it be only to have a knowledge of it, as he might of heathen mythology. Sir Isaac admits that Jesus was a great moral teacher, superior to everyone before or since. He also readily grants that the influence of Christianity has been for the good of man and wide-spreading in its expansion. Since his stroke of paralysis he often repeats texts and hymns he learnt when a child."

"Have you heard how he is?"

"Not directly, but I see in to-day's paper that his life is despaired of. There has been a consultation of three medical specialists, but they can do nothing."

"Let us hope that, with his return to a child's mind, he may have returned to a child's faith also."

They remained seated in silence, gazing on the vast expanse of the sea. The villa in which they were stood on the cliffs, at some distance from the small seaside town, and but few people passed by.

"This is quiet after your noisy district, Dick," Lionel observed.

"Yes, it is. Scenes of activity are seldom places for meditation. There is more thought in a country lane

than in a crowded thoroughfare. The flight of time seems hurried by the rapid succession of ideas."

"What is time?"

"And what is space? Are they synonymous or cor-relatives?"

"Dick, I have often tried to make a definition which will adequately express what time is."

"And have failed?"

"Yes."

"There must be a succession of ideas and some notion of motion in time. Would 'motion mentally measured by the succession of ideas' satisfy your requirements? Even if it will, Lionel, I am certain it would convey no meaning to an ordinary mind, which can only compute time by its measurement on a clock or watch. Eternity is that where time is not. If not time, therefore not space. Such is beyond human comprehension, because whatever the mind can conceive must be bounded by the limits of space and measured by time."

"The mind cannot grasp the idea of unlimited or infinite."

"Because life on this earth is finite, all conceptions must be finite so far as this world is concerned. The belief in the immortality of the soul can alone give any idea of infinity."

"A long life is only a very short space of time, and yet we all—or nearly all—desire longevity."

"Undoubtedly, Lionel. The tendency of all research in medical science is to prolong life, but it is much to be questioned whether length of days, unless accompanied by a desire to live better, is an unmixed blessing. Death must end all, and, after death, what matter whether life's span has been fifty years or a

hundred and fifty, unless they have been passed in doing God's service?"

Lionel remained silent.

"I have often marvelled," continued Parson Dick, "why the study of natural science should make men, ay, and women too, sceptical. If they truly believed in God before they commenced their studies, it seems to me that the more they learn of the wonders in nature, the more they should marvel at the power and the love of God."

"Dick, it is the difficulty, I might almost say the impossibility, of the reconciliation of Bible statements with scientific discoveries."

"Are there no anomalies in science? I am fully persuaded that science, when we know vastly more than we do now, will only establish the belief in God. In science you suspend judgment and patiently wait until knowledge has grown. A student of nature should also rest in faith, with the full assurance that Almighty God has revealed His power and His love for man in all that He has created, and that perfect knowledge—when that has been attained—will cast out all doubts and fears. This patient waiting is faith."

The conversation was interrupted by the lunch bell, and during the afternoon Parson Dick was too fatigued even to talk. In the early evening Dr. Tippet returned, and after Parson Dick had retired to bed, he discussed with Lionel the best and easiest means of returning to London.

The invalid bore the journey better than they anticipated, and it was a great relief to his anxious friends when they saw him in Lionel's home, tired and weak, but very cheerful.

The next day Parson Dick was not only bright and cheerful, but seemed to be less exhausted. Felix Fitz-Jones was one of the first comers.

"Richardson, I am pleased to see you looking so happy," he said.

"I am happy, Fitz-Jones, and I feel wonderfully well to-day, for which I am thankful, as I have much to do. Miss Standish has told me of your disengagement and re-engagement. You have acted as a man, ay, and more than that, as a Christian. I wish to see Miss Ford presently, and many others."

"I hope you won't fatigue yourself too much, Richardson."

"If I over-fatigue myself, I may shorten my life by a few hours. That I am quite willing to do, if it gives pleasure to others."

"Richardson—no, I will call you what everyone else does—'Parson Dick'—I can quite believe that you, who have given years for others, will not begrudge minutes."

"Fitz-Jones, have you quite realised what the sacrifice which you are making means, when you renounce the parish church for my poor district?"

"Parson Dick, I do realise it, and Ethel is quite ready to share my humble lot in life. Although I am not rich, I have a small income. It is only a hundred pounds a year, but Ethel's aunt has left her a like amount, and on that we can live comfortably."

"I am glad to hear it, Fitz-Jones. Friends will not fail you any more than they have failed me, and I need not add that God will not. You have made me happy beyond words, and my last prayer will be that God may bless your efforts."

"Amen," said Fitz-Jones devoutly. "I have some

news to tell you, relative to what may be my parish."

He told Parson Dick of Mr. Smithkins's efforts, and of his resolution to pull down the public-house; also of the bishop's acquiescence in the plan, and promise of assistance.

"It is rarely that God's labourers are permitted to see so much fruit resulting from their work. I knew that Mr. Smithkins would do that some day. Believe me, Fitz-Jones, that there is a good spot in all, if you can only find it and enlarge it."

When Parson Dick heard of the numerous enquiries after him, and the varied presents from his poor folks, tears filled his eyes.

"These poor people are wonderfully grateful. Even when I have met with ingratitude, I have been forced to put this question to myself: 'Are such more ungrateful to us than we are to God, who has done so much more for us than we can ever imagine?'"

They talked for some few minutes over parochial affairs, when Felix Fitz-Jones rose to go.

"Parson Dick," he said, "I thank God for having sent me to see you that night. It has been the turning-point in my life, and it is to you that I am indebted also."

"You are about to discharge the debt by taking my work. Good-bye, and may the blessing of God Almighty rest on your work; may the comfort of His Holy Spirit cheer you when discouraged and depressed; and may we be reunited with Jesus beyond the grave. Good-bye."

Fitz-Jones pressed Parson Dick's hand, fully realising that they might not meet again in this world.

Dr. Tippet came in directly he was gone. He did

not even examine his patient. His practical, his experienced eye knew that the end was near, very near.

"Dr. Tippet, I wish to see Violet now."

The doctor bowed his head and left the room, returning in a few minutes with Violet.

"Violet," exclaimed Parson Dick, and his face brightened.

"Parson Dick!" she replied, in a very tremulous voice.

She came across the room, and took his proffered hand; then, unable to control her emotion, she sank into a chair and sobbed.

"I meant to be so calm and collected," she said in faltering tones, "so as not to distress you."

"Violet, my own darling," he replied, "it is far better to be natural. We understand each other now—I will not say now—we have understood each other for a long, long time. We will not murmur against God's will, Violet."

The poor girl could not utter a word, and her sobs were painful to hear. The little doctor gazed out of the window, but his quivering frame betrayed his emotion.

"Violet, I have a wish—a last wish to express to you."

"Tell me, Parson Dick, what it is?"

"It will be hard for you to promise me to fulfil it. I do not ask you to promise. It is my wish—my dying wish, Violet. When I am gone, it is my earnest hope that you will marry Lionel Standish. I know you will never forget me, but in time the bitterness of grief must be calmed; and then, if Lionel becomes, what I believe he will with God's grace, a servant

of his Lord, I trust you will remember my last wish."

Violet could not reply. She gazed at his pale, thin face, and then she kissed his forehead, the first kiss—and the last.

Suddenly, Parson Dick was seized with a violent fit of coughing, a blood-vessel was ruptured, and his life ebbed quickly, in spite of Dr. Tippet's skill, aided by Lionel and Miss Standish.

Violet looked on as if it were a dream. Parson Dick was dying! He sank back on his pillow—his eyes were closed. How loudly the clock ticked in the solemn silence! He was so pale and still that the poor girl thought he was dead. A cloud had floated across the sun's rays, and the room became darkened. Not a word was spoken. On one side of his pillow Violet stood, and on the other was Miss Standish, her face bearing a smile, such a sad, sweet smile that indicated the deep sympathy in an old maid's heart.

Lionel was standing at the foot of the bed anxiously watching the face of his dear friend.

The cloud floated by, and the slanting rays of golden light illumined the countenance of the dying man. His eyes opened, oh, so bright! His lips slightly moved as if he would speak. Violet went nearer him. His eyes met hers and then Lionel's, and then he gazed at the setting sun. A smile of heavenly joy lighted up his face as he looked into the heavens, and his hands moved upwards.

The smile died away—the eyes were closed—one sigh—and Parson Dick had crossed the bar.

* * * * *

"No, Dr. Tippet, don't tell me Parson Dick is dead! It can't be—it can't be!"

"Mr. Smithkins, Parson Dick died an hour ago. I could not return home without letting you know."

"Parson Dick dead ! And he never knowed what we was going to do for him. Don't say, doctor, that he is quite dead."

The powerful frame of the burly brewer was convulsed.

"Mr. Fitz-Jones told him what was going to be done, and he blessed those who were doing it."

"Parson Dick dead !" repeated Mr. Smithkins, as if by repetition of the words he could realise what they meant. "Parson Dick dead ! Tom Smithkins, who'll guide you to heaven now ? Parson Dick dead !"

"Come, Mr. Smithkins, cheer up. Now that he is dead, there is more work for us. We must strive together to help Mr. Fitz-Jones to carry out his work. Will you call on me this evening to arrange about the funeral ?"

"Parson Dick dead ! Funeral !"

Mr. Smithkins sank into his chair and cried like a child.

CHAPTER XXI

A N D L A S T

MR. SMITHKINS found relief in action. For three days he was actively engaged in making arrangements for Parson Dick's funeral. That district of London had never before beheld such a scene as when the hearse, containing the mortal remains of their beloved pastor and friend, waited in front of the Mission Church. Every shop in the district was shut, and the public-house opposite the church had closed its doors for the last time. Women left their washtubs and men quitted their work. All—men, women, and children—were gathered together to render the last token of respect to him they had loved so well. In front of the hearse was the band of the volunteers, of which corps Parson Dick had been chaplain, and after them came the Sunday school children. Carriages were numerous, and behind these, stretching for a mile or more, was a long stream of men, women, and children.

The costers had left their barrows and, with bared heads, joined in the procession, and even Cobbler Links bowed his head as the coffin passed his house.

When the muffled drum was struck, a thrill passed through the assembled thousands, and as the "Dead

March" in Saul was played they slowly followed the body to the cemetery to hear the final portion of the burial service.

The bishop stood at the side of the grave and read the prayers. On his right was Felix Fitz-Jones, and on his left the leading Nonconformist minister of the district. Behind them were seen the uniforms of some members of the Salvation Army, and a priest of the Roman Church stood near. For once Christians remembered only those things in which they were agreed. Faction was forgotten. All were ready to honour and respect a noble and devoted life.

Near the bishop were the friends of Parson Dick—Violet, in deep mourning, with her sister and her father; Edward Armstrong with Lionel and his aunt and Ethel Ford; Mr. Smithkins with Mr. Tomlyne, and many, many others.

As the coffin was lowered into the grave, the children sang Parson Dick's hymn, accompanied, in subdued tones, by the band. Not a dry eye was visible.

The bishop uttered a few words of consolation, and pointed out the influence of a life of self-sacrifice, urging those, as they loved Parson Dick, to "go and do likewise."

* * * * *

A year has passed. The new church and school, with club-room, have been built and dedicated to the service of God and of man. Felix Fitz-Jones and his wife have entered the humble vicarage which Ethel's father has built for them. Edward and Rose are married.

Mr. Smithkins is one of the most active workers at the working-men's club and coffee-room. Lionel

lectures, and has great influence over the men. Miss Standish is the chief adviser of Felix and his wife, and while she is there the parishioners are never in want of a friend when in need, nor of a censor when in fault.

Olive Kenyere became, in due course, M.A., D.Sc., and professor at a women's college. She was much admired for her learning, and this gratified her vanity for a time. She endeavoured to make some startling discovery in science, and failed to do so. Wearied at length with philosophy and infidelity, she tried several mystic creeds, and finally became a zealous Romanist.

* * * * *

It is the evening of the anniversary of Parson Dick's funeral. A girl, clad in black, is tending the flowers on his grave. She glances round as she hears footsteps approaching.

"Lionel!"

"Violet!"

He takes her hand, and looks at the stone, on which are inscribed the words: "Sleep on now and take your rest."

"Violet, I can now say, not only with my lips, but from the depths of my heart, 'I believe in God the Father, the Creator of mind and matter; and in Jesus Christ His Son, the Saviour of man; and in the Holy Spirit, by whose influence we are brought into a knowledge of the Father and the Son.' Violet, I have passed through the long, dark valley of doubt to the glorious light of faith. We know the last wish of him whose body here rests. I know you can never forget him, and I would not wish it otherwise. We may, I trust, aid each other in this life by our mutual

sympathy and—faith. Violet, over Parson Dick's grave I ask you if you will give me hope that some day you will fulfil his dying wish?"

Violet's eyes are dim; no words escape her lips, but the look she gives him bids him hope on.

* * * * *

"Sleep on now and take your rest, Parson Dick. Your task is over, your work is done. The silver cord is loosed and the thread of life is broken, and you are gone to your long, long home. Dust to dust is returned, but your spirit has fled to Him who gave it. Your words have entered deep into others, and your good deeds are not forgotten. Sleep on now, sleep on. Your labours oft seemed in vain, Parson Dick, while you toiled in your sowing, but the seeds have taken root. Often have you been wearied and sad, as failure seemed to be stamped on all your efforts, but now you know that no deeds done for Jesus can fail. There is many a heart blesses your name, Parson Dick, and thanks Him who gave you the spirit and power to lead wanderers home. Sleep on now, sleep on. 'Tis not only your deeds and your words which have wrought change in others, 'tis your life. Your life was your religion and your religion was your life. They saw your life, Parson Dick, and they tried to imitate it. They saw you were in earnest—oh, so terribly in earnest, and they knew you meant what you said, for you died for your work, and in your work. The drunkard has left his drink; the fallen have risen to try again; the weary have felt their burdens eased; the weak in faith have become strong. For they saw what you bade them do, you strove to do yourself. They still are fighting the battle of life.

Sleep on now and take your rest. Yes, Parson Dick, there is rest for you now ; but for us who yet remain there is much to be done. Let us arise and be doing until the call comes for us to cease from our labours, and then shall we rest too. Sleep on now, sleep on."

[THE END.]





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Parson Dick

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